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THE PERSONAL HISTORY
OF
DAVID COPPERFIELD

BY
CHARLES DICKENS

VOL. III.



WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY H. K. BROWNE.

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DAVID COPPERFIELD.

CHAPTER I.

THE WANDERER.

WE had a very serious conversation in Buckingham Street that night about the domestic occurrences I have detailed in the last chapter. My aunt was deeply interested in them, and walked up and down the room, with her arms folded, for more than two hours afterwards. Whenever she was particularly discomposed, she always performed one of these pedestrian feats; and the amount of her discomposure might always be estimated by the duration of her walk. On this occasion she was so much disturbed in mind as to find it necessary to open the bedroom door, and make a course for herself, comprising the full extent of the bedrooms, from wall to wall; and while Mr. Dick and I sat quietly by the fire, she kept passing in and out, along this measured track, at an unchanging pace, with the regularity of a clock pendulum.

When my aunt and I were left to ourselves by Mr. Dick's going out to bed, I sat down to write my letter to the two old ladies. By that time she was tired of walking, and sat by the fire with her dress

tucked up as usual. But instead of sitting in her usual manner, holding her glass upon her knee, she suffered it to stand neglected on the chimney-piece; and, resting her left elbow on her right arm, and her chin on her left hand, looked thoughtfully at me. As often as I raised my eyes from what I was about, I met hers. "I am in the lovingest of tempers, my dear," she would assure me with a nod, "but I am fidgeted and sorry!"

I had been too busy to observe, until after she was gone to bed, that she had left her night-mixture, as she always called it, untasted on the chimney-piece. She came to her door, with even more than her usual affection of manner, when I knocked to acquaint her with this discovery; but only said, "I have not the heart to take it. Trot, to-night," and shook her head, and went in again.

She read my letter to the two old ladies in the morning, and approved of it. I posted it, and had nothing to do then but wait, as patiently as I could, for the reply. I was still in this state of expectation, and had been for nearly a week, when I left the Doctor's one snowy night, to walk home.

It had been a bitter day, and a cutting northeast wind had blown for some time. The wind had gone down with the light, and so the snow had come on. It was a heavy, settled fall, I recollect, in great flakes; and it lay thick. The noise of wheels and tread of people were as hushed as if the streets had been strewn that depth with feathers.

My shortest way home — and I naturally took the shortest way on such a night — was through St. Martin's Lane. Now, the church which gives its name to the lane stood in a less free situation at



that time : there being no open space before it, and the lane winding down to the Strand. As I passed the steps of the portico, I encountered, at the corner, a woman's face. It looked in mine, passed across the narrow lane, and disappeared. I knew it. I had seen it somewhere. But I could not remember where. I had some association with it, that struck upon my heart directly ; but I was thinking of anything else when it came upon me, and was confused.

On the steps of the church there was the stooping figure of a man, who had put down some burden on the smooth snow to adjust it ; my seeing the face, and my seeing him, were simultaneous. I don't think I had stopped in my surprise ; but, in any case, as I went on, he rose, turned, and came down towards me. I stood face to face with Mr. Peggotty !

Then I remembered the woman. It was Martha, to whom Emily had given the money that night in the kitchen. Martha Endell — side by side with whom he would not have seen his dear niece, Ham had told me, for all the treasures wrecked in the sea.

We shook hands heartily. At first neither of us could speak a word.

"Mas'r Davy !" he said, griping me tight. "it do my art good to see you, sir. Well met, well met !"

"Well met, my dear old friend !" said I.

"I had my thowts o' coming to make inquisition for you, sir, to-night," he said, "but knowing as your aunt was living along wi' you — for I've been down yonder — Yarmouth way — I was afeard it was too late. I should have come early in the morning, sir, afore going away."

"Again?" said I.

"Yes, sir," he replied, patiently shaking his head, "I'm away to-morrow."

"Where were you going now?" I asked.

"Well," he replied, shaking the snow out of his long hair, "I was a-going to turn in somewheers."

In those days there was a side entrance to the stableyard of the Golden Cross, the inn so memorable to me in connection with his misfortune, nearly opposite to where we stood. I pointed out the gateway, put my arm through his, and we went across. Two or three public rooms opened out of the stableyard; and looking into one of them, and finding it empty, and a good fire burning, I took him in there.

When I saw him in the light, I observed, not only that his hair was long and ragged, but that his face was burnt dark by the sun. He was grayer, the lines in his face and forehead were deeper, and he had every appearance of having toiled and wandered through all varieties of weather; but he looked very strong, and like a man upheld by steadfastness of purpose, whom nothing could tire out. He shook the snow from his hat and clothes, and brushed it away from his face, while I was inwardly making these remarks. As he sat down opposite to me at a table, with his back to the door by which we had entered, he put out his rough hand again, and grasped mine warmly.

"I'll tell you, Mas'r Davy," he said, "wheer-all I've been, and what-all we've heerd. I've been fur, and we've heerd little; but I'll tell you!"

I rang the bell for something hot to drink. He would have nothing stronger than ale; and while it was being brought, and being warmed at the fire, he

sat thinking. There was a fine massive gravity in his face I did not venture to disturb.

"When she was a child," he said, lifting up his head soon after we were left alone, "she used to talk to me a deal about the sea, and about them coasts where the sea got to be dark blue, and to lay a shining and a shining in the sun. I thowt, odd times, as her father being drowned, made her think on it so much. I doen't know, you see, but maybe she believed—or hoped—he had drifted out to them parts, where the flowers is always a blowing, and the country bright."

"It is likely to have been a childish fancy," I replied.

"When she was—lost," said Mr. Peggotty, "I knowed in my mind as he would take her to them countries. I knowed in my mind as he'd have told her wonders of 'em, and how she was to be a lady theer, and how he got her to listen to him first along o' sech like. When we see his mother, I knowed quite well as I was right. I went across-channel to France, and landed theer, as if I'd fell down from the sky."

I saw the door move, and the snow drift in. I saw it move a little more, and a hand softly interpose to keep it open.

"I founnd out an English gentleman as was in authority," said Mr. Peggotty, "and told him I was a-going to seek my niece. He got me them papers as I wanted fur to carry me through—I doen't rightly know how they're called—and he would have give me money, but that I was thankful to have no need on. I thank him kind for all he done, I'm sure! 'I've wrote afore you,' he says to me, 'and I shall speak to many as will come that way,

and many will know you, fur distant from here, when you're a travelling alone.' I told him, best as I was able, what my gratitooode was, and went away through France."

"Alone, and on foot?" said I.

"Mostly afoot," he rejoined; "sometimes in carts along with people going to market; sometimes in empty coaches. Many mile a day afoot, and often with some poor soldier or another, travelling to see his friends. I couldn't talk to him," said Mr. Peggotty, "nor he to me; but we was company for one another, too, along the dusty roads."

I should have known that by his friendly tone.

"When I come to any town," he pursued, "I found the inn, and waited about the yard till some one turned up (some one mostly did) as knowed English. Then I told how that I was on my way to seek my niece, and they told me what manner of gentlefolks was in the house, and I waited to see any as seemed like her, going in or out. When it warn't Em'ly, I went on agen. By little and little, when I come to a new village or that, among the poor people, I found they knowed about me. They would set me down at their cottage doors, and give me what not fur to eat and drink, and show me where to sleep; and many a woman, Mas'r Davy, as has had a daughter of about Em'ly's age, I've found a waiting for me, at Our Saviour's Cross outside the village, fur to do me sim'lar kindnesses. Some has had daughters as was dead. And God only knows how good them mothers was to me!"

It was Martha at the door. I saw her haggard, listening face distinctly. My dread was lest he should turn his head, and see her too.

"They would often put their children — partic'lar their little girls," said Mr. Peggotty, "upon my knee; and many a time you might have seen me sitting at their doors, when night was coming on, a'most as if they'd been my Darling's children. Oh, my Darling!"

Overpowered by sudden grief, he sobbed aloud. I laid my trembling hand upon the hand he put before his face. "Thankee, sir," he said, "doen't take no notice."

In a very little while he took his hand away and put it in his breast, and went on with his story.

"They often walked with me," he said, "in the morning, maybe a mile or two upon my road; and when we parted, and I said, 'I'm very thankful to you! God bless you!' they always seemed to understand, and answered pleasant. At last I come to the sea. It warn't hard, you may suppose, for a seafaring man like me to work his way over to Italy. When I got theer, I wandered on as I had done afore. The people was just as good to me, and I should have gone from town to town, maybe the country through, but that I got news of her being seen among them Swiss mountains yonder. One as knowed his servant see 'em there, all three, and told me how they travelled, and where they was. I made for them mountains, Mas'r Davy, day and night. Ever so fur as I went, ever so fur the mountains seemed to shift away from me. But I come up with 'em, and I crossed 'em. When I got nigh the place as I had been told of, I began to think within my own self, 'What shall I do when I see her?'"

The listening face, insensible to the inclement

night, still drooped at the door, and the hands begged me — prayed me — not to cast it forth.

“I never doubted her,” said Mr. Peggotty. “No! Not a bit! On’y let her see my face — on’y let her heer my voice — on’y let my stanning still afore her bring to her thoughts the home she had fled away from, and the child she had been — and if she had growed to be a royal lady, she’d have fell down at my feet! I knowed it well! Many a time in my sleep had I heerd her cry out ‘Uncle!’ and seen her fall like death afore me. Many a time in my sleep had I raised her up, and whispered to her, ‘Em’ly, my dear, I am come fur to bring forgiveness, and to take you home!’”

He stopped and shook his head, and went on with a sigh.

“He was nowt to me now. Em’ly was all. I bought a country dress to put upon her; and I knowed that, once found, she would walk beside me over them stony roads, go where I would, and never, never leave me more. To put that dress upon her, and to cast off what she wore — to take her on my arm again, and wander towards home — to stop sometimes upon the road, and heal her bruised feet and her worse-bruised heart — was all that I thowt of now. I doen’t believe I should have done so much as look at him. But, Mas’r Davy, it warn’t to be — not yet! I was too late, and they was gone. Wheer, I couldn’t learn. Some said heer, some said theer. I travelled heer, and I travelled theer, but I found no Em’ly, and I travelled home.”

“How long ago?” I asked.

“A matter o’ fower days,” said Mr. Peggotty. “I sighted the old boat arter dark, and the light a

shining in the winder. When I come nigh, and looked in through the glass, I see the faithful creature Missis Gummidge sittin' by the fire, as we had fixed upon, alone. I called out, 'Doen't be afeard! It's Dan'l!' and I went in. I never could have thowt the old boat would have been so strange!"

From some pocket in his breast he took out, with a very careful hand, a small paper bundle containing two or three letters or little packets, which he laid upon the table.

"This first one come," he said, selecting it from the rest, "afore I had been gone a week. A fifty-pound bank note, in a sheet of paper, directed to me, and put underneath the door in the night. She tried to hide her writing, but she couldn't hide it from Me!"

He folded up the note again, with great patience and care, in exactly the same form, and laid it on one side.

"This come to Missis Gummidge," he said, opening another, "two or three months ago." After looking at it for some moments, he gave it to me, and added in a low voice, "Be so good as read it, sir."

I read as follows:—

"Oh, what will you feel when you see this writing, and know it comes from my wicked hand! But try, try—not for my sake, but for uncle's goodness, try to let your heart soften to me, only for a little little time! Try, pray do, to relent towards a miserable girl, and write down on a bit of paper whether he is well, and what he said about me before you left off ever naming me among yourselves—and whether, of a night, when it is my old time of coming home, you ever see him look as if he thought of one he used to love so dear. Oh, my heart is breaking when I think about it! I am kneeling

down to you, begging and praying you not to be as hard with me as I deserve—as I well, well know I deserve—but to be so gentle and so good, as to write down something of him, and to send it to me. You need not call me Little, you need not call me by the name I have disgraced; but oh, listen to my agony, and have mercy on me so far as to write me some word of uncle, never, never to be seen in this world by my eyes again!

“Dear, if your heart is hard towards me—justly hard, I know—but, Listen, if it is hard, dear, ask him I have wronged the most—him whose wife I was to have been—before you quite decide against my poor, poor prayer! If he should be so compassionate as to say that you might write something for me to read—I think he would, oh, I think he would, if you would only ask him, for he always was so brave and so forgiving—tell him then (but not else), that when I hear the wind blowing at night, I feel as if it was passing angrily from seeing him and uncle, and was going up to God against me. Tell him that if I was to die to-morrow (and oh, if I was fit I would be so glad to die!) I would bless him and uncle with my last words, and pray for his happy home with my last breath!”

Some money was enclosed in this letter also. Five pounds. It was untouched, like the previous sum, and he refolded it in the same way. Detailed instructions were added relative to the address of a reply, which, although they betrayed the intervention of several hands, and made it difficult to arrive at any very probable conclusion in reference to her place of concealment, made it at least not unlikely that she had written from that spot where she was stated to have been seen.

“What answer was sent?” I inquired of Mr. Peggotty.

“Missis Gummidge,” he returned, “not being a good scholar, sir, Ham kindly drawed it out, and she made a copy on it. They told her I

was gone to seek her, and what my parting words was."

"Is that another letter in your hand?" said I.

"It's money, sir," said Mr. Peggotty, unfolding it a little way. "Ten pound, you see. And wrote inside, 'From a true friend,' like the first. But the first was put underneath the door, and this come by the post, day afore yesterday. I'm going to seek her at the post-mark."

He showed it to me. It was a town on the Upper Rhine. He had found out, at Yarmouth, some foreign dealers who knew that country, and they had drawn him a rude map on paper, which he could very well understand. He laid it between us on the table; and, with his chin resting on one hand, tracked his course upon it with the other.

I asked him how Ham was. He shook his head.

"He works," he said, "as bold as a man can. His name's as good, in all that part, as any man's is, anywheres in the wureld. Any one's hand is ready to help him, you understand, and his is ready to help them. He's never been heerd fur to complain. But my sister's belief is ('twixt ourselves) as it has cut him deep."

"Poor fellow, I can believe it!"

"He ain't no care, Mas'r Davy," said Mr. Peggotty in a solemn whisper — "keinder no care no-how for his life. When a man's wanted for rough service in rough weather, he's theer. When there's hard duty to be done, with danger in it, he steps forward afore all his mates. And yet he's as gentle as any child. There ain't a child in Yarmouth that doesn't know him."

He gathered up the letters thoughtfully, smooth-

ing them with his hand; put them into their little bundle; and placed it tenderly in his breast again. The face was gone from the door. I still saw the snow drifting in, but nothing else was there.

"Well!" he said, looking to his bag, "having seen you to-night, Mas'r Davy (and that doos me good!) I shall away betimes to-morrow morning. You have seen what I've got heer;" putting his hand on where the little packet lay; "all that troubles me is, to think that any harm might come to me afore that money was give back. If I was to die, and it was lost, or stole, or elseways made away with, and it was never knowed by him but what I'd took it, I believe the t'other wureld wouldn't hold me! I believe I must come back!"

He rose, and I rose too; we grasped each other by the hand again before going out.

"I'd go ten thousand mile," he said, "I'd go till I dropped dead, to lay that money down afore him. If I do that, and find my Em'ly, I'm content. If I doesn't find her, maybe she'll come to hear, sometime, as her loving uncle only ended his search for her when he ended his life; and if I know her, even that will turn her home at last!"

As we went out into the rigorous night, I saw the lonely figure flit away before us. I turned him hastily on some pretence, and held him in conversation until it was gone.

He spoke of a travellers' house on the Dover Road, where he knew he could find a clean, plain lodging for the night. I went with him over Westminster Bridge, and parted from him on the Surrey shore. Everything seemed, to my imagination, to be hushed in reverence for him, as he resumed his solitary journey through the snow.

I returned to the inn yard, and, impressed by my remembrance of the face, looked awfully around for it. It was not there. The snow had covered our late footprints; my new track was the only one to be seen; and even that began to die away (it snowed so fast) as I looked back over my shoulder.

CHAPTER II.

DORA'S AUNTS.

AT last an answer came from the two old ladies. They presented their compliments to Mr. Copperfield, and informed him that they had given his letter their best consideration, "with a view to the happiness of both parties" — which I thought rather an alarming expression, not only because of the use they had made of it in relation to the family difference before mentioned, but because I had (and have all my life) observed that conventional phrases are a sort of fireworks, easily let off, and liable to take a great variety of shapes and colors not at all suggested by their original form. The Misses Spenlow added that they begged to forbear expressing, "through the medium of correspondence," an opinion on the subject of Mr. Copperfield's communication; but that if Mr. Copperfield would do them the favor to call, upon a certain day (accompanied, if he thought proper, by a confidential friend), they would be happy to hold some conversation on the subject.

To this favor Mr. Copperfield immediately replied, with his respectful compliments, that he would have the honor of waiting on the Misses

Spellow at the time appointed; accompanied, in accordance with their kind permission, by his friend Mr. Thomas Traddles, of the Inner Temple. Having despatched which missive, Mr. Copperfield fell into a condition of strong nervous agitation; and so remained until the day arrived.

It was a great augmentation of my uneasiness to be bereaved at this eventful crisis, of the inestimable services of Miss Mills. But Mr. Mills, who was always doing something or other to annoy me—or I felt as if he were, which was the same thing—had brought his conduct to a climax, by taking it into his head that he would go to India. Why should he go to India, except to harass me? To be sure he had nothing to do with any other part of the world, and had a good deal to do with that part; being entirely in the Indian trade, whatever that was (I had floating dreams myself concerning golden shawls and elephants' teeth); having been at Calcutta in his youth; and designing now to go out there again, in the capacity of resident partner. But this was nothing to me. However, it was so much to him that for India he was bound, and Julia with him; and Julia went into the country to take leave of her relations; and the house was put into a perfect suit of bills, announcing that it was to be let or sold, and that the furniture (Mangle and all) was to be taken at a valuation. So, here was another earthquake of which I became the sport, before I had recovered from the shock of its predecessor!

I was in several minds how to dress myself on the important day. Being divided between my desire to appear to advantage, and my apprehensions of putting on anything that might impair

my severely practical character in the eyes of the Misses Spenlow, I endeavored to hit a happy medium between these two extremes. My aunt approved the result; and Mr. Dick threw one of his shoes after Traddles and me, for luck, as we went downstairs.

Excellent fellow as I knew Traddles to be, and warmly attached to him as I was, I could not help wishing, on that delicate occasion, that he had never contracted the habit of brushing his hair so very upright. It gave him a surprised look — not to say a hearth-broomy kind of expression — which, my apprehensions whispered, might be fatal to us.

I took the liberty of mentioning it to Traddles as we were walking to Putney; and saying that if he *would* smooth it down a little —

“My dear Copperfield,” said Traddles, lifting off his hat, and rubbing his hair all kinds of ways, “nothing would give me greater pleasure. But it won’t.”

“Won’t be smoothed down?” said I.

“No,” said Traddles. “Nothing will induce it. If I was to carry a half-hundredweight upon it all the way to Putney, it would be up again the moment the weight was taken off. You have no idea what obstinate hair mine is, Copperfield. I am quite a fretful porcupine.”

I was a little disappointed, I must confess, but thoroughly charmed by his good nature, too. I told him how I esteemed his good nature; and said that his hair must have taken all the obstinacy out of his character, for *he* had none.

“Oh!” returned Traddles, laughing, “I assure you, it’s quite an old story, my unfortunate hair.

My uncle's wife couldn't bear it. She said it exasperated her. It stood very much in my way, too, when I first fell in love with Sophy. Very much!"

"Did she object to it?"

"*She* didn't," rejoined Traddles; "but her eldest sister—the one that's the Beauty—quite made game of it, I understand. In fact, all the sisters laugh at it."

"Agreeable!" said I.

"Yes," returned Traddles with perfect innocence, "it's a joke for us. They pretend that Sophy has a lock of it in her desk, and is obliged to shut it in a clasped book, to keep it down. We laugh about it."

"By the by, my dear Traddles," said I, "your experience may suggest something to me. When you became engaged to the young lady whom you have just mentioned, did you make a regular proposal to her family? Was there anything like—what we are going through to-day, for instance?" I added nervously.

"Why," replied Traddles, on whose attentive face a thoughtful shade had stolen, "it was rather a painful transaction, Copperfield, in my case. You see, Sophy being of so much use in the family, none of them could endure the thought of her ever being married. Indeed, they had quite settled among themselves that she never was to be married, and they called her the old maid. Accordingly, when I mentioned it, with the greatest precaution, to Mrs. Crewler—"

"The mamma?" said I.

"The mamma," said Traddles—"Reverend Horace Crewler—when I mentioned it with every

possible precaution to Mrs. Crewler, the effect upon her was such that she gave a scream, and became insensible. I couldn't approach the subject again for months."

"You did it at last?" said I.

"Well, the Reverend Horace did," said Traddles. "He is an excellent man, most exemplary in every way; and he pointed out to her that she ought, as a Christian, to reconcile herself to the sacrifice (especially as it was so uncertain), and to bear no uncharitable feeling towards me. As to myself, Copperfield, I give you my word, I felt a perfect bird of prey towards the family."

"The sisters took your part, I hope, Traddles?"

"Why, I can't say they did," he returned. "When we had comparatively reconciled Mrs. Crewler to it, we had to break it to Sarah. You recollect my mentioning Sarah, as the one that has something the matter with her spine?"

"Perfectly!"

"She clenched both her hands," said Traddles, looking at me in dismay; "shut her eyes; turned lead color; became perfectly stiff; and took nothing, for two days, but toast and water, administered with a teaspoon."

"What a very unpleasant girl, Traddles!" I remarked.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, Copperfield!" said Traddles. "She is a very charming girl, but she has a great deal of feeling. In fact, they all have. Sophy told me afterwards that the self-reproach she underwent while she was in attendance upon Sarah, no words could describe. I know it must have been severe, by my own feelings, Copperfield; which were

like a criminal's. After Sarah was restored, we still had to break it to the other eight; and it produced various effects upon them of a most pathetic nature. The two little ones, whom Sophy educates, have only just left off detesting me."

"At any rate, they are all reconciled to it now, I hope?" said I.

"Ye — yes, I should say they were, on the whole, resigned to it," said Traddles doubtfully. "The fact is, we avoid mentioning the subject; and my unsettled prospects and indifferent circumstances are a great consolation to them. There will be a deplorable scene whenever we are married. It will be much more like a funeral than a wedding. And they'll all hate me for taking her away!"

His honest face, as he looked at me with a serio-comic shake of his head, impresses me more in the remembrance than it did in the reality, for I was by this time in a state of such excessive trepidation and wandering of mind as to be quite unable to fix my attention on anything. On our approaching the house where the Misses Spenlow lived, I was at such a discount, in respect of my personal looks and presence of mind, that Traddles proposed a gentle stimulant in the form of a glass of ale. This having been administered at a neighboring public-house, he conducted me, with tottering steps, to the Misses Spenlow's door.

I had a vague sensation of being, as it were, on view, when the maid opened it; and of wavering, somehow, across a hall with a weather-glass in it, into a quiet little drawing-room on the ground-floor, commanding a neat garden. Also of sitting down here, on a sofa, and seeing Traddles's hair start up,

now his hat was removed, like one of those obtrusive little figures made of springs, that fly out of fictitious snuff-boxes when the lid is taken off. Also of hearing an old-fashioned clock ticking away on the chimney-piece, and trying to make it keep time to the jerking of my heart, — which it wouldn't. Also of looking round the room for any sign of Dora, and seeing none. Also of thinking that Jip once barked in the distance, and was instantly choked by somebody. Ultimately I found myself backing Traddles into the fireplace, and bowing in great confusion to two dry little elderly ladies, dressed in black, and each looking wonderfully like a preparation in chip or tan of the late Mr. Spenlow.

"Pray," said one of the two little ladies, "be seated."

When I had done tumbling over Traddles, and had sat upon something which was not a cat — my first seat was — I so far recovered my sight as to perceive that Mr. Spenlow had evidently been the youngest of the family; that there was a disparity of six or eight years between the two sisters; and that the younger appeared to be the manager of the conference, inasmuch as she had my letter in her hand — so familiar as it looked to me, and yet so odd! — and was referring to it through an eyeglass. They were dressed alike, but this sister wore her dress with a more youthful air than the other; and perhaps had a trifle more frill, or tucker, or brooch, or bracelet, or some little thing of that kind, which made her look more lively. They were both upright in their carriage, formal, precise, composed, and quiet. The sister who had not my letter, had her



arms crossed on her breast, and resting on each other, like an Idol.

"Mr. Copperfield, I believe?" said the sister who had got my letter, addressing herself to Traddles.

This was a frightful beginning. Traddles had to indicate that I was Mr. Copperfield, and I had to lay claim to myself, and they had to divest themselves of a preconceived opinion that Traddles was Mr. Copperfield, and altogether we were in a nice condition. To improve it, we all distinctly heard Jip give two short barks, and receive another choke.

"Mr. Copperfield!" said the sister with the letter.

I did something — bowed, I suppose — and was all attention, when the other sister struck in.

"My sister Lavinia," said she, "being conversant with matters of this nature, will state what we consider most calculated to promote the happiness of both parties."

I discovered afterwards that Miss Lavinia was an authority in affairs of the heart, by reason of there having anciently existed a certain Mr. Pidger, who played short whist, and was supposed to have been enamoured of her. My private opinion is, that this was entirely a gratuitous assumption, and that Pidger was altogether innocent of any such sentiments — to which he had never given any sort of expression that I could ever hear of. Both Miss Lavinia and Miss Clarissa had a superstition, however, that he would have declared his passion, if he had not been cut short in his youth (at about sixty) by over-drinking his constitution, and overdoing an attempt to set it right again by swilling Bath water. They had a lurking suspicion, even, that he died of

secret love ; though I must say there was a picture of him in the house with a damask nose, which concealment did not appear to have ever preyed upon.

“ We will not,” said Miss Lavinia, “ enter on the past history of this matter. Our poor brother Francis’s death has cancelled that.”

“ We had not,” said Miss Clarissa, “ been in the habit of frequent association with our brother Francis ; but there was no decided division or disunion between us. Francis took his road ; we took ours. We considered it conducive to the happiness of all parties that it should be so. And it was so.”

Each of the sisters leaned a little forward to speak, shook her head after speaking, and became upright again when silent. Miss Clarissa never moved her arms. She sometimes played tunes upon them with her fingers—minuets and marches, I should think—but never moved them.

“ Our niece’s position, or supposed position, is much changed by our brother Francis’s death,” said Miss Lavinia ; “ and therefore we consider our brother’s opinions as regarded her position as being changed too. We have no reason to doubt, Mr. Copperfield, that you are a young gentleman possessed of good qualities and honorable character ; or that you have an affection—or are fully persuaded that you have an affection—for our niece.”

I replied, as I usually did whenever I had a chance, that nobody had ever loved anybody else as I loved Dora. Traddles came to my assistance with a confirmatory murmur.

Miss Lavinia was going on to make some rejoinder, when Miss Clarissa, who appeared to be inces-

santly beset by a desire to refer to her brother Francis, struck in again : —

“If Dora’s mamma,” she said, “when she married our brother Francis, had at once said that there was not room for the family at the dinner-table, it would have been better for the happiness of all parties.”

“Sister Clarissa,” said Miss Lavinia, “perhaps we needn’t mind that now.”

“Sister Lavinia,” said Miss Clarissa, “it belongs to the subject. With your branch of the subject, on which alone you are competent to speak, I should not think of interfering. On this branch of the subject I have a voice and an opinion. It would have been better for the happiness of all parties if Dora’s mamma, when she married our brother Francis, had mentioned plainly what her intentions were. We should then have known what we had to expect. We should have said, ‘Pray do not invite us at any time;’ and all possibility of misunderstanding would have been avoided.”

When Miss Clarissa had shaken her head, Miss Lavinia resumed : again referring to my letter through her eyeglass. They both had little bright round twinkling eyes, by the way, which were like birds’ eyes. They were not unlike birds, altogether ; having a sharp, brisk, sudden manner, and a little, short, spruce way of adjusting themselves, like canaries.

Miss Lavinia, as I have said, resumed : —

“You ask permission of my sister Clarissa and myself, Mr. Copperfield, to visit here, as the accepted suitor of our niece.”

“If our brother Francis,” said Miss Clarissa, breaking out again, if I may call anything so calm

a breaking out, "wished to surround himself with an atmosphere of Doctors' Commons, and of Doctors' Commons only, what right or desire had we to object? None, I am sure. We have ever been far from wishing to obtrude ourselves on any one. But why not say so? Let our brother Francis and his wife have their society. Let my sister Lavinia and myself have our society. We can find it for ourselves. I hope!"

As this appeared to be addressed to Traddles and me, both Traddles and I made some sort of reply. Traddles was inaudible. I think I observed, myself, that it was highly creditable to all concerned. I don't in the least know what I meant.

"Sister Lavinia," said Miss Clarissa, having now relieved her mind. "you can go on, my dear."

Miss Lavinia proceeded:—

"Mr. Copperfield, my sister Clarissa and I have been very careful indeed in considering this letter: and we have not considered it without finally showing it to our niece, and discussing it with our niece. We have no doubt that you think you like her very much."

"Think, ma'am," I rapturously began. "oh!—"

But Miss Clarissa giving me a look (just like a sharp canary), as requesting that I would not interrupt the oracle, I begged pardon.

"Affection," said Miss Lavinia, glancing at her sister for corroboration, which she gave in the form of a little nod to every clause, "mature affection. homage, devotion, does not easily express itself. Its voice is low. It is modest and retiring, it lies in ambush, waits and waits. Such is the mature fruit. Sometimes a life glides away, and finds it still ripening in the shade."

Of course I did not understand then that this was an allusion to her supposed experience of the stricken Pidger; but I saw, from the gravity with which Miss Clarissa nodded her head, that great weight was attached to these words.

"The light — for I call them, in comparison with such sentiments, the light — inclinations of very young people," pursued Miss Lavinia, "are dust, compared to rocks. It is owing to the difficulty of knowing whether they are likely to endure, or have any real foundation, that my sister Clarissa and myself have been very undecided how to act, Mr. Copperfield, and Mr. ——"

"Traddles," said my friend, finding himself looked at.

"I beg pardon. Of the Inner Temple, I believe?" said Miss Clarissa, again glancing at my letter.

Traddles said "Exactly so," and became pretty red in the face.

Now, although I had not received any express encouragement as yet, I fancied that I saw in the two little sisters, and particularly in Miss Lavinia, an intensified enjoyment of this new and fruitful subject of domestic interest, a settling down to make the most of it, a disposition to pet it, in which there was a good bright ray of hope. I thought I perceived that Miss Lavinia would have uncommon satisfaction in superintending two young lovers, like Dora and me; and that Miss Clarissa would have hardly less satisfaction in seeing her superintend us, and in chiming in with her own particular department of the subject whenever that impulse was strong upon her. This gave me courage to protest most vehemently that I loved Dora better than I

could tell, or any one believe; that all my friends knew how I loved her; that my aunt, Agnes, Traddles, every one who knew me, knew how I loved her, and how earnest my love had made me. For the truth of this, I appealed to Traddles. And Traddles, firing up as if he were plunging into a Parliamentary Debate, really did come out nobly; confirming me in good round terms, and in a plain, sensible, practical manner, that evidently made a favorable impression.

"I speak, if I may presume to say so, as one who has some little experience of such things," said Traddles, "being myself engaged to a young lady—one of ten, down in Devonshire—and seeing no probability, at present, of our engagement coming to a termination."

"You may be able to confirm what I have said, Mr. Traddles," observed Miss Lavinia, evidently taking a new interest in him, "of the affection that is modest and retiring; that waits and waits?"

"Entirely, ma'am," said Traddles.

Miss Clarissa looked at Miss Lavinia, and shook her head gravely. Miss Lavinia looked consciously at Miss Clarissa, and heaved a little sigh.

"Sister Lavinia," said Miss Clarissa, "take my smelling-bottle."

Miss Lavinia revived herself with a few whiffs of aromatic vinegar—Traddles and I looking on with great solicitude the while; and then went on to say, rather faintly, —

"My sister and myself have been in great doubt, Mr. Traddles, what course we ought to take in reference to the likings, or imaginary likings, of such very young people as your friend Mr. Copperfield, and our niece."

"Our brother Francis's child," remarked Miss Clarissa. "If our brother Francis's wife had found it convenient in her lifetime (though she had an unquestionable right to act as she thought best) to invite the family to her dinner-table, we might have known our brother Francis's child better at the present moment. Sister Lavinia, proceed."

Miss Lavinia turned my letter, so as to bring the superscription towards herself, and referred through her eyeglass to some orderly-looking notes she had made on that part of it.

"It seems to us," said she, "prudent, Mr. Traddles, to bring these feelings to the test of our own observation. At present we know nothing of them, and are not in a situation to judge how much reality there may be in them. Therefore we are inclined so far to accede to Mr. Copperfield's proposal as to admit his visits here."

"I shall never, dear ladies," I exclaimed, relieved of an immense load of apprehension, "forget your kindness!"

"But," pursued Miss Lavinia, — "but, we would prefer to regard those visits, Mr. Traddles, as made, at present, to us. We must guard ourselves from recognizing any positive engagement between Mr. Copperfield and our niece, until we have had an opportunity —"

"Until *you* have had an opportunity, sister Lavinia," said Miss Clarissa.

"Be it so," assented Miss Lavinia, with a sigh, — "until I have had an opportunity of observing them."

"Copperfield," said Traddles, turning to me, "you feel, I am sure, that nothing could be more reasonable or considerate."

"Nothing!" cried I. "I am deeply sensible of it."

"In this position of affairs," said Miss Lavinia, again referring to her notes, "and admitting his visits on this understanding only, we must require from Mr. Copperfield a distinct assurance, on his word of honor, that no communication of any kind shall take place between him and our niece without our knowledge. That no project whatever shall be entertained with regard to our niece, without being first submitted to us —"

"To you, sister Lavinia," Miss Clarissa interposed.

"Be it so, Clarissa!" assented Miss Lavinia resignedly, — "to me — and receiving our concurrence. We must make this a most express and serious stipulation, not to be broken on any account. We wished Mr. Copperfield to be accompanied by some confidential friend to-day," with an inclination of her head towards Traddles, who bowed, "in order that there might be no doubt or misconception on this subject. If Mr. Copperfield, or if you, Mr. Traddles, feel the least scruple in giving this promise, I beg you to take time to consider it."

I exclaimed, in a state of high ecstatic fervor, that not a moment's consideration could be necessary. I bound myself by the required promise in a most impassioned manner; called upon Traddles to witness it; and denounced myself as the most atrocious of characters if I ever swerved from it in the least degree.

"Stay!" said Miss Lavinia, holding up her hand; "we resolved, before we had the pleasure of receiving you two gentlemen, to leave you alone for a

quarter of an hour, to consider this point. You will allow us to retire."

It was in vain for me to say that no consideration was necessary. They persisted in withdrawing for the specified time. Accordingly, these little birds hopped out with great dignity; leaving me to receive the congratulations of Traddles, and to feel as if I were translated to regions of exquisite happiness. Exactly at the expiration of the quarter of an hour, they re-appeared with no less dignity than they had disappeared. They had gone rustling away as if their little dresses were made of autumn leaves: and they came rustling back in like manner.

I then bound myself once more to the prescribed conditions.

"Sister Clarissa," said Miss Lavinia, "the rest is with you."

Miss Clarissa, unfolding her arms for the first time, took the notes and glanced at them.

"We shall be happy," said Miss Clarissa, "to see Mr. Copperfield to dinner, every Sunday, if it should suit his convenience. Our hour is three."

I bowed.

"In the course of the week," said Miss Clarissa, "we shall be happy to see Mr. Copperfield to tea. Our hour is half-past six."

I bowed again.

"Twice in the week," said Miss Clarissa, "but, as a rule, not oftener."

I bowed again.

"Miss Trotwood," said Miss Clarissa, "mentioned in Mr. Copperfield's letter, will perhaps call upon us. When visiting is better for the happiness of all parties, we are glad to receive visits, and return

them. When it is better for the happiness of all parties that no visiting should take place (as in the case of our brother Francis, and his establishment), that is quite different."

I intimated that my aunt would be proud and delighted to make their acquaintance; though I must say I was not quite sure of their getting on very satisfactorily together. The conditions being now closed, I expressed my acknowledgments in the warmest manner; and, taking the hand, first of Miss Clarissa, and then of Miss Lavinia, pressed it, in each case, to my lips.

Miss Lavinia then arose, and begging Mr. Tradgles to excuse us for a minute, requested me to follow her. I obeyed, all in a tremble, and was conducted into another room. There, I found my blessed darling stopping her ears behind the door, with her dear little face against the wall; and Jip in the plate-warmer, with his head tied up in a towel.

Oh! How beautiful she was in her black frock, and how she sobbed and cried at first, and wouldn't come out from behind the door! How fond we were of one another, when she did come out at last; and what a state of bliss I was in, when we took Jip out of the plate-warmer, and restored him to the light, sneezing very much, and were all three re-united!

"My dearest Dora! Now, indeed, my own forever!"

"Oh, don't!" pleaded Dora. "Please!"

"Are you not my own forever, Dora?"

"Oh yes, of course I am!" cried Dora, "but I am so frightened!"

"Frightened, my own?"

"Oh yes! I don't like him," said Dora. "Why don't he go?"

"Who, my life?"

"Your friend," said Dora. "It isn't any business of his. What a stupid he must be!"

"My love!" (There never was anything so coaxing as her childish ways.) "He is the best creature!"

"Oh, but we don't want any best creatures!" pouted Dora.

"My dear," I argued, "you will soon know him well, and like him of all things. And here is my aunt coming soon; and you'll like her of all things too, when you know her."

"No, please don't bring her!" said Dora, giving me a horrified little kiss, and folding her hands. "Don't. I know she's a naughty, mischief-making old thing! Don't let her come here, Doady!" which was a corruption of David.

Remonstrance was of no use then; so I laughed, and admired, and was very much in love and very happy; and she showed me Jip's new trick of standing on his hind-legs in a corner—which he did for about the space of a flash of lightning, and then fell down—and I don't know how long I should have staid there, oblivious of Traddles, if Miss Lavinia had not come in to take me away. Miss Lavinia was very fond of Dora (she told me Dora was exactly like what she had been herself at her age—she must have altered a good deal), and she treated Dora just as if she had been a toy. I wanted to persuade Dora to come and see Traddles, but on my proposing it she ran off to her own room, and locked herself in; so I went to

Traddles without her, and walked away with him on air.

"Nothing could be more satisfactory," said Traddles; "and they are very agreeable old ladies, I am sure. I shouldn't be at all surprised if you were to be married years before me, Copperfield."

"Does your Sophy play on any instrument, Traddles?" I inquired, in the pride of my heart.

"She knows enough of the piano to teach it to her little sisters," said Traddles.

"Does she sing at all?" I asked.

"Why, she sings ballads, sometimes, to freshen up the others a little when they're out of spirits," said Traddles. "Nothing scientific."

"She doesn't sing to the guitar?" said I.

"Oh dear no!" said Traddles.

"Paint at all?"

"Not at all," said Traddles.

I promised Traddles that he should hear Dora sing, and see some of her flower-painting. He said he should like it very much, and we went home arm in arm in great good humor and delight. I encouraged him to talk about Sophy on the way; which he did with a loving reliance on her that I very much admired. I compared her in my mind with Dora, with considerable inward satisfaction; but I candidly admitted to myself that she seemed to be an excellent kind of girl for Traddles, too.

Of course my aunt was immediately made acquainted with the successful issue of the conference, and with all that had been said and done in the course of it. She was happy to see me so happy, and promised to call on Dora's aunts without loss of time. But she took such a long walk up and down

our rooms that night, while I was writing to Agnes, that I began to think she meant to walk till morning.

My letter to Agnes was a fervent and grateful one, narrating all the good effects that had resulted from my following her advice. She wrote, by return of post, to me. Her letter was hopeful, earnest, and cheerful. She was always cheerful from that time.

I had my hands more full than ever now. My daily journeys to Highgate considered, Putney was a long way off; and I naturally wanted to go there as often as I could. The proposed tea-drinkings being quite impracticable, I compounded with Miss Lavinia for permission to visit every Saturday afternoon, without detriment to my privileged Sundays. So, the close of every week was a delicious time for me; and I got through the rest of the week by looking forward to it.

I was wonderfully relieved to find that my aunt and Dora's aunts rubbed on, all things considered, much more smoothly than I could have expected. My aunt made her promised visit within a few days of the conference; and, within a few more days, Dora's aunts called upon her, in due state and form. Similar but more friendly exchanges took place afterwards, usually at intervals of three or four weeks. I know that my aunt distressed Dora's aunts very much, by utterly setting at naught the dignity of fly-conveyance, and walking out to Putney at extraordinary times, as shortly after breakfast or just before tea; likewise by wearing her bonnet in any manner that happened to be comfortable to her head, without at all deferring to the

prejudices of civilization on that subject. But Dora's aunts soon agreed to regard my aunt as an eccentric and somewhat masculine lady, with a strong understanding; and although my aunt occasionally ruffled the feathers of Dora's aunts, by expressing heretical opinions on various points of ceremony, she loved me too well not to sacrifice some of her little peculiarities to the general harmony.

The only member of our small society, who positively refused to adapt himself to circumstances, was Jip. He never saw my aunt without immediately displaying every tooth in his head, retiring under a chair, and growling incessantly: with now and then a doleful howl, as if she really were too much for his feelings. All kinds of treatment were tried with him, coaxing, scolding, slapping, bringing him to Buckingham Street (where he instantly dashed at the two cats, to the terror of all beholders); but he never could prevail upon himself to bear my aunt's society. He would sometimes think he had got the better of his objection, and be amiable for a few minutes: and then would put up his snub nose, and howl to that extent, that there was nothing for it but to blind him, and put him in the plate-warmer. At length, Dora regularly muffled him in a towel, and shut him up there, whenever my aunt was reported at the door.

One thing troubled me much, after we had fallen into this quiet train. It was, that Dora seemed by one consent to be regarded like a pretty toy or plaything. My aunt, with whom she gradually became familiar, always called her Little Blossom; and the pleasure of Miss Lavinia's life was to wait upon

her, curl her hair, make ornaments for her, and treat her like a pet child. What Miss Lavinia did, her sister did as a matter of course. It was very odd to me; but they all seemed to treat Dora, in her degree, much as Dora treated Jip in his.

I made up my mind to speak to Dora about this; and one day when we were out walking (for we were licensed by Miss Lavinia, after a while, to go out walking by ourselves), I said to her that I wished she could get them to behave towards her differently.

"Because you know, my darling," I remonstrated, "you are not a child."

"There!" said Dora. "Now you're going to be cross!"

"Cross, my love?"

"I am sure they're very kind to me," said Dora, "and I am very happy."

"Well! But, my dearest life!" said I, "you might be very happy, and yet be treated rationally."

Dora gave me a reproachful look — the prettiest look! — and then began to sob, saying, if I didn't like her, why had I ever wanted so much to be engaged to her? And why didn't I go away now, if I couldn't bear her?

What could I do but kiss away her tears, and tell her how I doted on her, after that?

"I am sure I am very affectionate," said Dora; "you oughtn't to be cruel to me, Doady!"

"Cruel, my preeious love! As if I would — or could — be cruel to you, for the world!"

"Then don't find fault with me," said Dora, making a rosebud of her mouth; "and I'll be good."

I was charmed by her presently asking me, of her

own accord, to give her that Cookery Book I had once spoken of, and to show her how to keep accounts, as I had once promised I would. I brought the volume with me on my next visit (I got it prettily bound, first, to make it look less dry and more inviting); and, as we strolled about the Common, I showed her an old housekeeping book of my aunt's, and gave her a set of tablets, and a pretty little pencil-case, and box of leads, to practise housekeeping with.

But the Cookery Book made Dora's head ache, and the figures made her cry. They wouldn't add up, she said. So she rubbed them out, and drew little nosegays, and likenesses of me and Jip, all over the tablets.

Then I playfully tried verbal instruction in domestic matters, as we walked about on a Saturday afternoon. Sometimes, for example, when we passed a butcher's shop, I would say, —

“Now, suppose, my pet, that we were married, and you were going to buy a shoulder of mutton for dinner, would you know how to buy it?”

My pretty little Dora's face would fall, and she would make her mouth into a bud again, as if she would very much prefer to shut mine with a kiss.

“Would you know how to buy it, my darling?” I would repeat, perhaps, if I were very inflexible.

Dora would think a little, and then reply, perhaps, with great triumph, —

“Why, the butcher would know how to sell it, and what need *I* know? Oh, you silly boy!”

So, when I once asked Dora, with an eye to the Cookery Book, what she would do, if we were married, and I were to say I should like an nice Irish

stew, she replied that she would tell the servant to make it; and then clapped her little hands together across my arm, and laughed in such a charming manner, that she was more delightful than ever.

Consequently, the principal use to which the Cookery Book was devoted was being put down in the corner for Jip to stand upon. But Dora was so pleased, when she had trained him to stand upon it without offering to come off, and at the same time to hold the pencil-case in his mouth, that I was very glad I had bought it.

And we fell back on the guitar-case, and the flower-painting, and the songs about never leaving off dancing, Ta ra la! and were as happy as the week was long. I occasionally wished I could venture to hint to Miss Lavinia, that she treated the darling of my heart a little too much like a plaything; and I sometimes awoke, as it were, wondering to find that I had fallen into the general fault, and treated her like a plaything too—but not often.

CHAPTER III.

MISCHIEF.

I FEEL as if it were not for me to record, even though this manuscript is intended for no eyes but mine, how hard I worked at that tremendous shorthand, and all improvement appertaining to it, in my sense of responsibility to Dora and her aunts. I will only add to what I have already written of my perseverance at this time of my life, and of a patient and continuous energy which then began to be matured within me, and which I know to be the strong part of my character, if it have any strength at all, that there, on looking back, I find the source of my success. I have been very fortunate in worldly matters; many men have worked much harder, and not succeeded half so well; but I never could have done what I have done, without the habits of punctuality, order, and diligence, without the determination to concentrate myself on one object at a time, no matter how quickly its successor should come upon its heels, which I then formed. Heaven knows I write this in no spirit of self-laudation. The man who reviews his own life as I do mine, in going on here, from page to page, had need to have been a good man indeed if he

would be spared the sharp consciousness of many talents neglected, many opportunities wasted, many erratic and perverted feelings constantly at war within his breast, and defeating him. I do not hold one natural gift, I dare say, that I have not abused. My meaning simply is, that whatever I have tried to do in life, I have tried with all my heart to do well; that whatever I have devoted myself to, I have devoted myself to completely; that, in great aims and in small, I have always been thoroughly in earnest. I have never believed it possible that any natural or improved ability can claim immunity from the companionship of the steady, plain, hard-working qualities, and hope to gain its end. There is no such thing as such fulfilment on this earth. Some happy talent, and some fortunate opportunity, may form the two sides of the ladder on which some men mount, but the rounds of that ladder must be made of stuff to stand wear and tear; and there is no substitute for thorough-going, ardent, and sincere earnestness. Never to put one hand to anything on which I could throw my whole self; and never to affect depreciation of my work, whatever it was; I find, now, to have been my golden rules.

How much of the practice I have just reduced to precept, I owe to Agnes, I will not repeat here. My narrative proceeds to Agnes, with a thankful love.

She came on a visit of a fortnight to the Doctor's. Mr. Wickfield was the Doctor's old friend, and the Doctor wished to talk with him, and do him good. It had been matter of conversation with Agnes when she was last in town, and this visit was the

result. She and her father came together. I was not much surprised to hear from her that she had engaged to find a lodging in the neighborhood for Mrs. Heep, whose rheumatic complaint required change of air, and who would be charmed to have it in such company. Neither was I surprised when, on the very next day, Uriah, like a dutiful son, brought his worthy mother to take possession.

"You see, Master Copperfield," said he, as he forced himself upon my company for a turn in the Doctor's garden, "where a person loves, a person is a little jealous — leastways, anxious to keep an eye on the beloved one."

"Of whom are you jealous now?" said I.

"Thanks to you, Master Copperfield," he returned, "of no one in particular just at present — no male person, at least."

"Do you mean that you are jealous of a female person?"

He gave me a sidelong glance out of his sinister red eyes, and laughed.

"Really, Master Copperfield," he said — "I should say Mister, but I know you'll excuse the abit I've got into — you're so insinuating, that you draw me like a cork-screw! Well, I don't mind telling you," putting his fish-like hand on mine, "I'm not a lady's man in general, sir, and I never was with Mrs. Strong."

His eyes looked green now, as they watched mine with a rascally cunning.

"What do you mean?" said I.

"Why, though I am a lawyer, Master Copperfield," he replied with a dry grin, "I mean, just at present, what I say."

"And what do you mean by your look?" I retorted quietly.

"By my look? Dear me, Copperfield, that's sharp practice! What do I mean by my look?"

"Yes," said I. "By your look."

He seemed very much amused, and laughed as heartily as it was in his nature to laugh. After some scraping of his chin with his hand, he went on to say, with his eyes cast downward — still scraping very slowly, —

"When I was but a numble clerk, she always looked down upon me. She was forever having my Agnes backwards and forwards at her ouse, and she was forever being a friend to you, Master Copperfield; but I was too far beneath her, myself, to be noticed."

"Well?" said I; "suppose you were!"

"— And beneath him too," pursued Uriah, very distinctly, and in a meditative tone of voice, as he continued to scrape his chin.

"Don't you know the Doctor better," said I, "than to suppose him conscious of your existence, when you were not before him?"

He directed his eyes at me in that sidelong glance again, and he made his face very lantern-jawed, for the greater convenience of scraping, as he answered, —

"Oh dear, I am not referring to the Doctor! Oh no, poor man! I mean Mr. Maldon."

My heart quite died within me. All my old doubts and apprehensions on that subject, all the Doctor's happiness and peace, all the mingled possibilities of innocence and compromise, that I could not unravel, I saw, in a moment, at the mercy of this fellow's twisting.

"He never could come into the office without ordering and shoving me about," said Uriah. "One of your fine gentlemen, he was; I was very meek and umble — and I am. But I didn't like that sort of thing — and I don't!"

He left off scraping his chin, and sucked in his cheeks until they seemed to meet inside; keeping his sidelong glance upon me all the while.

"She is one of your lovely women, she is," he pursued, when he had slowly restored his face to its natural form; "and ready to be no friend to such as me, *I* know. She's just the person as would put my Agnes up to higher sort of game. Now, I ain't one of your ladies' men, Master Copperfield; but I've had eyes in my ed, a pretty long time back. We umble ones have got eyes, mostly speaking — and we look out of 'em."

I endeavored to appear unconscious and not disquieted, but, I saw in his face, with poor success.

"Now, I'm not a-going to let myself be run down, Copperfield," he continued, raising that part of his countenance, where his red eyebrows would have been if he had had any, with malignant triumph, "and I shall do what I can to put a stop to this friendship. I don't approve of it. I don't mind acknowledging to you that I've got rather a grudging disposition, and want to keep off all intruders. I ain't a-going, if I know it, to run the risk of being plotted against."

"You are always plotting, and delude yourself into the belief that everybody else is doing the like, I think," said I.

"Perhaps so, Master Copperfield," he replied. "But I've got a motive, as my fellow-partner used

to say; and I go at it tooth and nail. I mustn't be put upon, as a numble person, too much. I can't allow people in my way. Really they must come out of the cart, Master Copperfield!"

"I don't understand you," said I.

"Don't you, though?" he returned with one of his jerks. "I'm astonished at that, Master Copperfield, you being usually so quick! I'll try to be plainer another time. — Is that Mr. Maldon a-norse-back, ringing at the gate, sir?"

"It looks like him," I replied as carelessly as I could.

Uriah stopped short, put his hands between his great knobs of knees, and doubled himself up with laughter. With perfectly silent laughter. Not a sound escaped from him. I was so repelled by his odious behavior, particularly by this concluding instance, that I turned away without any ceremony; and left him doubled up in the middle of the garden, like a scarecrow in want of support.

It was not on that evening; but, as I well remember, on the next evening but one, which was a Saturday; that I took Agnes to see Dora. I had arranged the visit beforehand with Miss Lavinia; and Agnes was expected to tea.

I was in a flutter of pride and anxiety; pride in my dear little betrothed, and anxiety that Agnes should like her. All the way to Putney, Agnes being inside the stage-coach, and I outside, I pictured Dora to myself in every one of the pretty looks I knew so well; now making up my mind that I should like her to look exactly as she looked at such a time, and then doubting whether I should not prefer her looking as she looked at such another

time; and almost worrying myself into a fever about it.

I was troubled by no doubt of her being very pretty in any case; but it fell out that I had never seen her look so well. She was not in the drawing-room when I presented Agnes to her little aunts, but was shyly keeping out of the way. I knew where to look for her now; and sure enough I found her stopping her ears again, behind the same dull old door.

At first she wouldn't come at all; and then she pleaded for five minutes by my watch. When at length she put her arm through mine, to be taken to the drawing-room, her charming little face was flushed, and had never been so pretty. But, when we went into the room, and it turned pale, she was ten thousand times prettier yet.

Dora was afraid of Agnes. She had told me that she knew Agnes was "too clever." But when she saw her looking at once so cheerful and so earnest, and so thoughtful, and so good, she gave a faint little cry of pleased surprise, and just put her affectionate arms round Agnes's neck, and laid her innocent cheek against her face.

I never was so happy. I never was so pleased as when I saw those two sit down together, side by side. As when I saw my little darling looking up so naturally to those cordial eyes. As when I saw the tender, beautiful regard which Agnes cast upon her.

Miss Lavinia and Miss Clarissa partook, in their way, of my joy. It was the pleasantest tea-table in the world. Miss Clarissa presided. I cut and handed the sweet seed-cake—the little sisters had

a bird-like fondness for picking up seeds and pecking at sugar; Miss Lavinia looked on with benignant patronage, as if our happy love were all her work; and we were perfectly contented with ourselves and one another.

The gentle cheerfulness of Agnes went to all their hearts. Her quiet interest in everything that interested Dora; her manner of making acquaintance with Jip (who responded instantly); her pleasant way, when Dora was ashamed to come over to her usual seat by me; her modest grace and ease, eliciting a crowd of blushing little marks of confidence from Dora; seemed to make our circle quite complete.

"I am so glad," said Dora after tea, "that you like me. I didn't think you would; and I want, more than ever, to be liked, now Julia Mills is gone."

I have omitted to mention it, by the by. Miss Mills had sailed, and Dora and I had gone aboard a great East Indiaman at Gravesend to see her; and we had had preserved ginger, and guava, and other delicacies of that sort for lunch; and we had left Miss Mills weeping on a camp-stool on the quarter-deck, with a large new diary under her arm, in which the original reflections awakened by the contemplation of Ocean were to be recorded under lock and key.

Agnes said she was afraid I must have given her an unpromising character; but Dora corrected that directly.

"Oh no!" she said, shaking her curls at me; "it was all praise. He thinks so much of your opinion, that I was quite afraid of it."

"My good opinion cannot strengthen his attachment to some people whom he knows," said Agnes with a smile; "it is not worth their having."

"But please let me have it," said Dora in her coaxing way, "if you can!"

We made merry about Dora's wanting to be liked, and Dora said I was a goose, and she didn't like me, at any rate, and the short evening flew away on gossamer wings. The time was at hand when the coach was to call for us. I was standing alone before the fire, when Dora came stealing softly in, to give me that usual precious little kiss before I went.

"Don't you think, if I had had her for a friend a long time ago, Doady," said Dora, her bright eyes shining very brightly, and her little right hand idly busying itself with one of the buttons of my coat, "I might have been more clever, perhaps?"

"My love!" said I, "what nonsense!"

"Do you think it is nonsense?" returned Dora, without looking at me. "Are you sure it is?"

"Of course I am!"

"I have forgotten," said Dora, still turning the button round and round, "what relation Agnes is to you, you dear bad boy."

"No blood relation," I replied; "but we were brought up together, like brother and sister."

"I wonder why you ever fell in love with me?" said Dora, beginning on another button of my coat.

"Perhaps because I couldn't see you, and not love you, Dora!"

"Suppose you had never seen me at all?" said Dora, going to another button.

"Suppose we had never been born?" said I gayly.

I wondered what she was thinking about, as I glanced in admiring silence at the little soft hand travelling up the row of buttons on my coat, and at the clustering hair that lay against my breast, and at the lashes of her downcast eyes, slightly rising as they followed her idle fingers. At length her eyes were lifted up to mine, and she stood on tiptoe to give me, more thoughtfully than usual, that precious little kiss—once, twice, three times—and went out of the room.

They all came back together within five minutes afterwards, and Dora's unusual thoughtfulness was quite gone then. She was laughingly resolved to put Jip through the whole of his performances before the coach came. They took some time (not so much on account of their variety, as Jip's reluctance), and were still unfinished when it was heard at the door. There was a hurried but affectionate parting between Agnes and herself; and Dora was to write to Agnes (who was not to mind her letters being foolish, she said), and Agnes was to write to Dora; and they had a second parting at the coach door, and a third when Dora, in spite of the remonstrances of Miss Lavinia, would come running out once more to remind Agnes at the coach window about writing, and to shake her curls at me on the box.

The stage-coach was to put us down near Covent Garden, where we were to take another stage-coach for Highgate. I was impatient for the short walk in the interval, that Agnes might praise Dora to me. Ah! what praise it was! How lovingly and fervently did it commend the pretty creature I had won, with all her artless graces best displayed, to

my most gentle care! How thoughtfully remind me, yet with no pretence of doing so, of the trust in which I held the orphan child!

Never, never had I loved Dora so deeply and truly as I loved her that night. When we had again alighted, and were walking in the starlight along the quiet road that led to the Doctor's house, I told Agnes it was her doing.

"When you were sitting by her," said I, "you seemed to be no less *her* guardian angel than mine; and you seem so now, Agnes."

"A poor angel," she returned, "but faithful."

The clear tone of her voice, going straight to my heart, made it natural to me to say, —

"The cheerfulness that belongs to you, Agnes (and to no one else that ever I have seen), is so restored, I have observed to-day, that I have begun to hope you are happier at home?"

"I am happier in myself," she said; "I am quite cheerful and light-hearted."

I glanced at the serene face looking upward, and thought it was the stars that made it seem so noble.

"There has been no change at home," said Agnes after a few moments.

"No fresh reference," said I, "to — I wouldn't distress you, Agnes, but I cannot help asking — to what we spoke of when we parted last?"

"No, none," she answered.

"I have thought so much about it."

"You must think less about it. Remember that I confide in simple love and truth at last. Have no apprehensions for me, Trotwood," she added after a moment; "the step you dread my taking, I shall never take."

Although I think I had never really feared it, in any season of cool reflection, it was an unspeakable relief to me to have this assurance from her own truthful lips. I told her so, earnestly.

"And when this visit is over," said I — "for we may not be alone another time — how long is it likely to be, my dear Agnes, before you come to London again?"

"Probably a long time," she replied; "I think it will be best — for papa's sake — to remain at home. We are not likely to meet often, for some time to come; but I shall be a good correspondent of Dora's, and we shall frequently hear of one another that way."

We were now within the little courtyard of the Doctor's cottage. It was growing late. There was a light in the window of Mrs. Strong's chamber, and Agnes, pointing to it, bade me good-night.

"Do not be troubled," she said, giving me her hand, "by our misfortunes and anxieties. I can be happier in nothing than in your happiness. If you can ever give me help, rely upon it I will ask you for it. God bless you always!"

In her beaming smile, and in these last tones of her cheerful voice, I seemed again to see and hear my little Dora in her company. I stood a while, looking through the porch at the stars, with a heart full of love and gratitude, and then walked slowly forth. I had engaged a bed at a decent alehouse close by, and was going out at the gate, when, happening to turn my head, I saw a light in the Doctor's study. A half-reproachful fancy came into my mind that he had been working at the Dictionary without my help. With the view of seeing if this were so, and, in any

case, of bidding him good-night, if he were yet sitting among his books, I turned back, and going softly across the hall, and gently opening the door, looked in.

The first person whom I saw, to my surprise, by the sober light of the shaded lamp, was Uriah. He was standing close beside it, with one of his skeleton hands over his mouth, and the other resting on the Doctor's table. The Doctor sat in his study chair, covering his face with his hands. Mr. Wickfield, sorely troubled and distressed, was leaning forward, irresolutely touching the Doctor's arm.

For an instant I supposed that the Doctor was ill. I hastily advanced a step under that impression, when I met Uriah's eye, and saw what was the matter. I would have withdrawn, but the Doctor made a gesture to detain me, and I remained.

"At any rate," observed Uriah, with a writhe of his ungainly person, "we may keep the door shut. We needn't make it known to ALL the town."

Saying which, he went on his toes to the door, which I had left open, and carefully closed it. He then came back, and took up his former position. There was an obtrusive show of compassionate zeal in his voice and manner, more intolerable — at least to me — than any demeanor he could have assumed.

"I have felt it incumbent upon me, Master Copperfield," said Uriah, "to point out to Doctor Strong what you and me have already talked about. You didn't exactly understand me, though!"

I gave him a look, but no other answer; and, going to my good old master, said a few words that I meant to be words of comfort and encouragement. He put his hand upon my shoulder, as it had been

his custom to do when I was quite a little fellow, but did not lift his gray head.

"As you didn't understand me, Master Copperfield," resumed Uriah in the same officious manner, "I may take the liberty of unblushingly mentioning, being among friends, that I have called Doctor Strong's attention to the goings-on of Mrs. Strong. It's much against the grain with me, I assure you, Copperfield, to be concerned in anything so unpleasant; but really, as it is, we're all mixing ourselves up with what oughtn't to be. That was what my meaning was, sir, when you didn't understand me."

I wonder now, when I recall his leer, that I did not collar him, and try to shake the breath out of his body.

"I dare say I didn't make myself very clear," he went on, "nor you neither. Naturally, we was both of us inclined to give such a subject a wide berth. Hows'ever, at last I have made up my mind to speak plain; and I have mentioned to Doctor Strong that — Did you speak, sir?"

This was to the Doctor, who had moaned. The sound might have touched any heart, I thought, but it had no effect upon Uriah's.

"— Mentioned to Doctor Strong," he proceeded, "that any one may see that Mr. Maldon, and the lovely and agreeable lady as is Doctor Strong's wife, are too sweet on one another. Really the time is come (we being at present all mixing ourselves up with what oughtn't to be), when Doctor Strong must be told that this was full as plain to everybody as the sun, before Mr. Maldon went to India; that Mr. Maldon made excuses to come back, for

nothing else, and that he's always here, for nothing else. When you come in, sir, I was just putting it to my fellow-partner," towards whom he turned, "to say to Doctor Strong, upon his word and honor, whether he'd ever been of this opinion long ago, or not. Come, Mr. Wickfield, sir! Would you be so good as tell us? Yes or no, sir? Come, partner!"

"For God's sake, my dear Doctor," said Mr. Wickfield, again laying his irresolute hand upon the Doctor's arm, "don't attach too much weight to any suspicions I may have entertained."

"There!" cried Uriah, shaking his head. "What a melancholy confirmation: ain't it? Him! Such an old friend! Bless your soul, when I was nothing but a clerk in his office, Copperfield, I've seen him twenty times, if I've seen him once, quite in a taking about it—quite put out, you know (and very proper in him as a father; I'm sure *I* can't blame him), to think that Miss Agnes was mixing herself up with what oughtn't to be."

"My dear Strong," said Mr. Wickfield in a tremulous voice, "my good friend. I needn't tell you that it has been my vice to look for some one master motive in everybody, and to try all actions by one narrow test. I may have fallen into such doubts as I have had, through this mistake."

"You have had doubts, Wickfield?" said the Doctor, without lifting up his head. "You have had doubts?"

"Speak up, fellow-partner," urged Uriah.

"I had, at one time, certainly," said Mr. Wickfield. "I—God forgive me!—I thought *you* had."

"No, no, no!" returned the Doctor in a tone of most pathetic grief.

"I thought at one time," said Mr. Wickfield, "that you wished to send Maldon abroad to effect a desirable separation."

"No, no, no!" returned the Doctor. "To give Annie pleasure, by making some provision for the companion of her childhood. Nothing else."

"So I found," said Mr. Wickfield. "I couldn't doubt it when you told me so. But I thought—I implore you to remember the narrow construction which has been my besetting sin—that, in a case where there was so much disparity in point of years—"

"That's the way to put it, you see, Master Copperfield!" observed Uriah, with fawning and offensive pity.

"—A lady of such youth, and such attractions, however real her respect for you, might have been influenced, in marrying, by worldly considerations only. I made no allowance for innumerable feelings and circumstances that may have all tended to good. For Heaven's sake remember that!"

"How kind he puts it!" said Uriah, shaking his head.

"Always observing her from one point of view," said Mr. Wickfield; "but, by all that is dear to you, my old friend, I entreat you to consider what it was; I am forced to confess, now, having no escape—"

"No! There's no way out of it, Mr. Wickfield, sir," observed Uriah, "when it's got to this."

"—That I did," said Mr. Wickfield, glancing helplessly and distractedly at his partner, "that I did doubt her, and think her wanting in her duty to you; and that I did sometimes, if I must say all,

feel averse to Agnes being in such a familiar relation towards her, as to see what I saw, or in my diseased theory fancied that I saw. I never mentioned this to any one. I never meant it to be known to any one. And though it is terrible to you to hear," said Mr. Wickfield, quite subdued, "if you knew how terrible it is to me to tell, you would feel compassion for me!"

The Doctor, in the perfect goodness of his nature, put out his hand. Mr. Wickfield held it for a little while in his, with his head bowed down.

"I am sure," said Uriah, writhing himself into the silence like a Conger-eel, "that this is a subject full of unpleasantness to everybody. But since we have got so far, I ought to take the liberty of mentioning that Copperfield has noticed it too."

I turned upon him, and asked him how he dared refer to me?

"Oh! it's very kind of you, Copperfield," returned Uriah, undulating all over, "and we all know what an amiable character yours is; but you know that, the moment I spoke to you the other night, you knew what I meant. You know you knew what I meant, Copperfield. Don't deny it! You deny it with the best intentions; but don't do it, Copperfield."

I saw the mild eye of the good old Doctor turned upon me for a moment, and I felt that the confession of my old misgivings and remembrances was too plainly written in my face to be overlooked. It was of no use raging. I could not undo that. Say what I would, I could not unsay it.

We were silent again, and remained so, until the Doctor rose and walked twice or thrice across the

room. Presently he returned to where his chair stood; and, leaning on the back of it, and occasionally putting his handkerchief to his eyes, with a simple honesty that did him more honor, to my thinking, than any disguise he could have affected, said, —

“I have been much to blame. I believe I have been very much to blame. I have exposed one whom I hold in my heart to trials and aspersions — I call them aspersions, even to have been conceived in anybody’s inmost mind — of which she never, but for me, could have been the object.”

Uriah Heep gave a kind of snivel. I think to express sympathy.

“Of which my Annie,” said the Doctor, “never, but for me, could have been the object. Gentlemen, I am old now, as you know; I do not feel, to-night, that I have much to live for. But my life — my Life — upon the truth and honor of the dear lady who has been the subject of this conversation!”

I do not think that the best embodiment of chivalry, the realization of the handsomest and most romantic figure ever imagined by painter, could have said this with a more impressive and affecting dignity than the plain old Doctor did.

“But I am not prepared,” he went on, “to deny — perhaps I may have been, without knowing it, in some degree prepared to admit — that I may have unwittingly ensnared that lady into an unhappy marriage. I am a man quite unaccustomed to observe; and I cannot but believe that the observation of several people, of different ages and positions, all too plainly tending in one direction (and that so natural), is better than mine.”

I had often admired, as I have elsewhere described, his benignant manner towards his youthful wife; but the respectful tenderness he manifested in every reference to her on this occasion, and the almost reverential manner in which he put away from him the lightest doubt of her integrity, exalted him, in my eyes, beyond description.

"I married that lady," said the Doctor, "when she was extremely young. I took her to myself when her character was scarcely formed. So far as it was developed, it had been my happiness to form it. I knew her father well. I knew her well. I had taught her what I could, for the love of all her beautiful and virtuous qualities. If I did her wrong; as I fear I did, in taking advantage (but I never meant it) of her gratitude and her affection; I ask pardon of that lady in my heart!"

He walked across the room, and came back to the same place; holding the chair with a grasp that trembled, like his subdued voice, in its earnestness.

"I regarded myself as a refuge, for her, from the dangers and vicissitudes of life. I persuaded myself that, unequal though we were in years, she would live tranquilly and contentedly with me. I did not shut out of my consideration the time when I should leave her free, and still young and still beautiful, but with her judgment more matured — no, gentlemen — upon my truth!"

His homely figure seemed to be lightened up by his fidelity and generosity. Every word he uttered had a force that no other grace could have imparted to it.

"My life with this lady has been very happy.

Until to-night I have had uninterrupted occasion to bless the day on which I did her great injustice."

His voice, more and more faltering in the utterance of these words, stopped for a few moments; then he went on, —

"Once awakened from my dream — I have been a poor dreamer, in one way or other, all my life — I see how natural it is that she should have some regretful feeling towards her old companion and her equal. That she does regard him with some innocent regret, with some blameless thoughts of what might have been, but for me, is, I fear, too true. Much that I have seen, but not noted, has come back upon me with new meaning during this last trying hour. But, beyond this, gentlemen, the dear lady's name never must be coupled, with a word, a breath, of doubt."

For a little while his eye kindled and his voice was firm; for a little while he was again silent. Presently, he proceeded as before: —

"It only remains for me to bear the knowledge of the unhappiness I have occasioned, as submissively as I can. It is she who should reproach; not I. To save her from misconception, cruel misconception, that even my friends have not been able to avoid, becomes my duty. The more retired we live, the better I shall discharge it. And when the time comes — may it come soon, if it be His merciful pleasure! — when my death shall release her from constraint, I shall close my eyes upon her honored face with unbounded confidence and love; and leave her, with no sorrow then, to happier and brighter days."

I could not see him for the tears which his earn-

estness and goodness, so adorned by, and so adorning, the perfect simplicity of his manner, brought into my eyes. He had moved to the door when he added, —

“Gentlemen, I have shown you my heart. I am sure you will respect it. What we have said to-night is never to be said more. Wickfield, give me an old friend’s arm upstairs !”

Mr. Wickfield hastened to him. Without interchanging a word, they went slowly out of the room together, Uriah looking after them.

“Well, Master Copperfield !” said Uriah, meekly turning to me. “The thing hasn’t took quite the turn that might have been expected, for the old Scholar — what an excellent man ! — is as blind as a brickbat ; but *this* family’s out of the cart, I think !”

I needed but the sound of his voice to be so madly enraged as I never was before, and never have been since.

“You villain !” said I, “what do you mean by entrapping me into your schemes ? How dare you appeal to me, just now, you false rascal, as if we had been in discussion together ?”

As we stood, front to front, I saw so plainly, in the stealthy exultation of his face, what I already so plainly knew ; I mean that he forced his confidence upon me, expressly to make me miserable, and had set a deliberate trap for me in this very matter ; that I couldn’t bear it. The whole of his lank cheek was invitingly before me, and I struck it with my open hand with that force that my fingers tingled as if I had burnt them.

He caught the hand in his, and we stood in that

connection, looking at each other. We stood so a long time; long enough for me to see the white marks of my fingers die out of the deep red of his cheek, and leave it a deeper red.

"Copperfield," he said at length, in a breathless voice, "have you taken leave of your senses?"

"I have taken leave of you," said I, wresting my hand away. "You dog, I'll know no more of you!"

"Won't you?" said he, constrained by the pain of his cheek to put his hand there. "Perhaps you won't be able to help it. Isn't this ungrateful of you, now?"

"I have shown you often enough," said I, "that I despise you. I have shown you now, more plainly, that I do. Why should I dread your doing your worst to all about you? What else do you ever do?"

He perfectly understood this allusion to the considerations that had hitherto restrained me in my communications with him. I rather think that neither the blow, nor the allusion, would have escaped me, but for the assurance I had had from Agnes that night. It is no matter.

There was another long pause. His eyes, as he looked at me, seemed to take every shade of color that could make eyes ugly.

"Copperfield," he said, removing his hand from his cheek, "you have always gone against me. I know you always used to be against me at Mr. Wickfield's."

"You may think what you like," said I, still in a towering rage. "If it is not true, so much the worthier you."

"And yet I always liked you, Copperfield," he rejoined.

I deigned to make him no reply ; and, taking up my hat, was going out to bed, when he came between me and the door.

"Copperfield," he said, "there must be two parties to a quarrel. I won't be one."

"You may go to the devil !" said I.

"Don't say that," he replied. "I know you'll be sorry afterwards. How can you make yourself so inferior to me as to show such a bad spirit ? But I forgive you."

"You forgive me !" I repeated disdainfully.

"I do, and you can't help yourself," replied Uriah. "To think of your going and attacking *me*, that have always been a friend to you ! But there can't be a quarrel without two parties, and I won't be one. I will be a friend to you in spite of you. So you know what you've got to expect."

The necessity of carrying on this dialogue (his part in which was very slow ; mine very quick) in a low tone, that the house might not be disturbed at an unseasonable hour, did not improve my temper ; though my passion was cooling down. Merely telling him that I should expect from him what I always had expected, and had never yet been disappointed in, I opened the door upon him, as if he had been a great walnut put there to be cracked, and went out of the house. But he slept out of the house, too, at his mother's lodging, and, before I had gone many hundred yards, came up with me.

"You know, Copperfield," he said in my ear (I did not turn my head), "you're in quite a wrong position ;" which I felt to be true, and that made me chafe the more ; "you can't make this a brave thing, and you can't help being forgiven. I don't

intend to mention it to mother, or to any living soul. I'm determined to forgive you. But I do wonder that you should lift your hand against a person that you knew to be so unble!"

I felt only less mean than he. He knew me better than I knew myself. If he had retorted or openly exasperated me, it would have been a relief and a justification; but he had put me on a slow fire, on which I lay tormented half the night.

In the morning, when I came out, the early church bell was ringing, and he was walking up and down with his mother. He addressed me as if nothing had happened, and I could do no less than reply. I had struck him hard enough to give him the toothache, I suppose. At all events, his face was tied up in a black silk handkerchief, which, with his hat perched on the top of it, was far from improving his appearance. I heard that he went to a dentist's in London on the Monday morning, and had a tooth out. I hope it was a double one.

The Doctor gave out that he was not quite well; and he remained alone, for a considerable part of every day, during the remainder of the visit. Agnes and her father had been gone a week before we resumed our usual work. On the day preceding its resumption, the Doctor gave me with his own hands a folded note not sealed. It was addressed to myself; and laid an injunction on me, in a few affectionate words, never to refer to the subject of that evening. I had confided it to my aunt, but to no one else. It was not a subject I could discuss with Agnes, and Agnes certainly had not the least suspicion of what had passed.

Neither, I felt convinced, had Mrs. Strong then.

Several weeks elapsed before I saw the least change in her. It came on slowly, like a cloud when there is no wind. At first, she seemed to wonder at the gentle compassion with which the Doctor spoke to her, and at his wish that she should have her mother with her, to relieve the dull monotony of her life. Often when we were at work, and she was sitting by, I would see her pausing and looking at him with that memorable face. Afterwards, I sometimes observed her rise, with her eyes full of tears, and go out of the room. Gradually, an unhappy shadow fell upon her beauty, and deepened every day. Mrs. Markleham was a regular inmate of the cottage then; but she talked and talked, and saw nothing.

As this change stole on Annie, once like sunshine in the Doctor's house, the Doctor became older in appearance, and more grave; but the sweetness of his temper, the placid kindness of his manner, and his benevolent solicitude for her, if they were capable of any increase, were increased. I saw him once, early on the morning of her birthday, when she came to sit in the window while we were at work (which she had always done, but now began to do with a timid and uncertain air that I thought very touching), take her forehead between his hands, kiss it, and go hurriedly away, too much moved to remain. I saw her stand where he had left her, like a statue; and then bend down her head, and clasp her hands, and weep, I cannot say how sorrowfully.

Sometimes, after that, I fancied that she tried to speak, even to me, in intervals when we were left alone. But she never uttered word. The Doctor always had some new project for her participating

in amusements away from home with her mother; and Mrs. Markleham, who was very fond of amusements, and very easily dissatisfied with anything else, entered into them with great good will, and was loud in her commendations. But Annie, in a spiritless, unhappy way, only went whither she was led, and seemed to have no care for anything.

I did not know what to think. Neither did my aunt; who must have walked, at various times, a hundred miles in her uncertainty. What was strangest of all was, that the only real relief which seemed to make its way into the secret region of this domestic unhappiness made its way there in the person of Mr. Dick.

What his thoughts were on the subject, or what his observation was, I am as unable to explain as I dare say he would have been to assist me in the task. But, as I have recorded in the narrative of my school days, his veneration for the Doctor was unbounded; and there is a subtlety of perception in real attachment, even when it is borne towards man by one of the lower animals, which leaves the highest intellect behind. To this mind of the heart, if I may call it so, in Mr. Dick some bright ray of the truth shot straight.

He had proudly resumed his privilege, in many of his spare hours, of walking up and down the garden with the Doctor; as he had been accustomed to pace up and down the Doctor's Walk at Canterbury. But matters were no sooner in this state than he devoted all his spare time (and got up earlier to make it more) to these perambulations. If he had never been so happy as when the Doctor read that marvellous performance, the Dictionary, to him; he

was now quite miserable unless the Doctor pulled it out of his pocket, and began. When the Doctor and I were engaged, he now fell into the custom of walking up and down with Mrs. Strong, and helping her to trim her favorite flowers, or weed the beds. I dare say he rarely spoke a dozen words in an hour: but his quiet interest, and his wistful face, found immediate response in both their breasts; each knew that the other liked him, and that he loved both; and he became what no one else could be — a link between them.

When I think of him, with his impenetrably wise face, walking up and down with the Doctor, delighted to be battered by the hard words in the Dictionary; when I think of him carrying huge watering-pots after Annie; kneeling down, in very paws of gloves, at patient microscopic work among the little leaves; expressing as no philosopher could have expressed, in everything he did, a delicate desire to be her friend; showering sympathy, trustfulness, and affection out of every hole in the watering-pot; when I think of him never wandering in that better mind of his to which unhappiness addressed itself, never bringing the unfortunate King Charles into the garden, never wavering in his grateful service, never diverted from his knowledge that there was something wrong, or from his wish to set it right — I really feel almost ashamed of having known that he was not quite in his wits, taking account of the utmost I have done with mine.

“Nobody but myself, Trot, knows what that man is!” my aunt would proudly remark when we conversed about it. “Dick will distinguish himself yet!”

I must refer to one other topic before I close this chapter. While the visit at the Doctor's was still in progress, I observed that the postman brought two or three letters every morning for Uriah Heep, who remained at Highgate until the rest went back, it being a leisure time ; and that these were always directed in a business-like manner by Mr. Micawber, who now assumed a round legal hand. I was glad to infer, from these slight premises, that Mr. Micawber was doing well ; and consequently was much surprised to receive, about this time, the following letter from his amiable wife.

“CANTERBURY, *Monday Evening.*

“You will doubtless be surprised, my dear Mr. Copperfield, to receive this communication. Still more so, by its contents. Still more so, by the stipulation of implicit confidence which I beg to impose. But my feelings as a wife and mother require relief ; and, as I do not wish to consult my family (already obnoxious to the feelings of Mr. Micawber), I know no one of whom I can better ask advice than my friend and former lodger.

“You may be aware, my dear Mr. Copperfield, that between myself and Mr. Micawber (whom I will never desert), there has always been preserved a spirit of mutual confidence. Mr. Micawber may have occasionally given a bill without consulting me, or he may have misled me as to the period when that obligation would become due. This has actually happened. But, in general, Mr. Micawber has had no secrets from the bosom of affection — I allude to his wife — and has invariably, on our retirement to rest, recalled the events of the day.

"You will picture to yourself, my dear Mr. Copperfield, what the poignancy of my feelings must be when I inform you that Mr. Micawber is entirely changed. He is reserved. He is secret. His life is a mystery to the partner of his joys and sorrows — I again allude to his wife — and if I should assure you that, beyond knowing that it is passed from morning till night at the office, I now know no less of it than I do of the man in the south, connected with whose mouth the thoughtless children repeat an idle tale respecting cold plum porridge, I should adopt a popular fallacy to express an actual fact.

"But this is not all. Mr. Micawber is morose. He is severe. He is estranged from our eldest son and daughter, he has no pride in his twins, he looks with an eye of coldness even on the unoffending stranger who last became a member of our circle. The pecuniary means of meeting our expenses, kept down to the utmost farthing, are obtained from him with great difficulty, and even under fearful threats that he will settle himself (the exact expression); and he inexorably refuses to give any explanation whatever of this distracting policy.

"This is hard to bear. This is heart-breaking. If you will advise me, knowing my feeble powers such as they are, how you think it will be best to exert them in a dilemma so unwonted, you will add another friendly obligation to the many you have already rendered me. With loves from the children, and a smile from the happily unconscious stranger, I remain, dear Mr. Copperfield,

"Your afflicted,

"EMMA MICAWBER."

I did not feel justified in giving a wife of Mrs. Micawber's experience any other recommendation than that she should try to reclaim Mr. Micawber by patience and kindness (as I knew she would in any case); but the letter set me thinking about him very much.

CHAPTER IV.

ANOTHER RETROSPECT.

ONCE again let me pause upon a memorable period of my life. Let me stand aside to see the phantoms of those days go by me, accompanying the shadow of myself, in dim procession.

Weeks, months, seasons, pass along. They seem little more than a summer day and a winter evening. Now, the Common where I walk with Dora is all in bloom, a field of bright gold; and now the unseen heather lies in mounds and bunches underneath a covering of snow. In a breath, the river that flows through our Sunday walks is sparkling in the summer sun, is ruffled by the winter wind, or thickened with drifting heaps of ice. Faster than ever river ran towards the sea, it flashes, darkens, and rolls away.

Not a thread changes in the house of the two little bird-like ladies. The clock ticks over the fire-place, the weather-glass hangs in the hall. Neither clock nor weather-glass is ever right; but we believe in both devoutly.

I have come legally to man's estate. I have attained the dignity of twenty-one. But this is a sort of dignity that may be thrust upon one. Let me think what I have achieved.

I have tamed that savage stenographic mystery. I make a respectable income by it. I am in high repute for my accomplishment in all pertaining to the art, and am joined with eleven others in reporting the debates in Parliament for a Morning Newspaper. Night after night I record predictions that never come to pass, professions that are never fulfilled, explanations that are only meant to mystify. I wallow in words. Britannia, that unfortunate female, is always before me, like a trussed fowl: skewered through and through with office pens, and bound hand and foot with red tape. I am sufficiently behind the scenes to know the worth of political life. I am quite an infidel about it, and shall never be converted.

My dear old Traddles has tried his hand at the same pursuit, but it is not in Traddles's way. He is perfectly good-humored respecting his failure, and reminds me that he always did consider himself slow. He has occasional employment on the same newspaper, in getting up the facts of dry subjects, to be written about and embellished by more fertile minds. He is called to the bar; and with admirable industry and self-denial has scraped another hundred pounds together, to fee a conveyancer whose chambers he attends. A great deal of very hot port wine was consumed at his call; and, considering the figure, I should think the Inner Temple must have made a profit by it.

I have come out in another way. I have taken with fear and trembling to authorship. I wrote a little something, in secret, and sent it to a magazine, and it was published in the magazine. Since then, I have taken heart to write a good many trifling

pieces. Now, I am regularly paid for them. Altogether, I am well off; when I tell my income on the fingers of my left hand, I pass the third finger, and take in the fourth to the middle joint.

We have removed from Buckingham Street, to a pleasant little cottage very near the one I looked at when my enthusiasm first came on. My aunt, however (who has sold the house at Dover to good advantage), is not going to remain here, but intends removing herself to a still more tiny cottage close at hand. What does this portend? My marriage? Yes!

Yes! I am going to be married to Dora! Miss Lavinia and Miss Clarissa have given their consent; and, if ever canary birds were in a flutter, they are. Miss Lavinia, self-charged with the superintendence of my darling's wardrobe, is constantly cutting out brown-paper cuirasses, and differing in opinion from a highly respectable young man, with a long bundle, and a yard-measure under his arm. A dressmaker, always stabbed in the breast with a needle and thread, boards and lodges in the house; and seems to me, eating, drinking, or sleeping, never to take her thimble off. They make a lay-figure of my dear. They are always sending for her to come and try something on. We can't be happy for five minutes in the evening, but some intrusive female knocks at the door, and says, "Oh, if you please, Miss Dora, would you step upstairs?"

Miss Clarissa and my aunt roam all over London, to find out articles of furniture for Dora and me to look at. It would be better for them to buy the goods at once, without this ceremony of inspection; for, when we go to see a kitchen fender and meat-

screen, Dora sees a Chinese house for Jip, with little bells on the top, and prefers that. And it takes a long time to accustom Jip to his new residence, after we have bought it; whenever he goes in or out, he makes all the little bells ring, and is horribly frightened.

Peggotty comes up to make herself useful, and falls to work immediately. Her department appears to be, to clean everything over and over again. She rubs everything that can be rubbed, until it shines, like her own honest forehead, with perpetual friction. And now it is that I begin to see her solitary brother passing through the dark streets at night, and looking, as he goes, among the wandering faces. I never speak to him at such an hour. I know too well, as his grave figure passes onward, what he seeks, and what he dreads.

Why does Traddles look so important when he calls upon me this afternoon in the Commons—where I still occasionally attend, for form's sake, when I have time? The realization of my boyish day dreams is at hand. I am going to take out the license.

It is a little document to do so much; and Traddles contemplates it, as it lies upon my desk, half in admiration, half in awe. There are the names in the sweet old visionary connection. David Copperfield and Dora Spenlow; and there, in the corner, is that Parental Institution, the Stamp Office, which is so benignantly interested in the various transactions of human life, looking down upon our Union; and there is the Archbishop of Canterbury invoking a blessing on us in print, and doing it as cheap as could possibly be expected.

Nevertheless, I am in a dream, a flustered, happy, hurried dream. I can't believe that it is going to be; and yet I can't believe but that every one I pass in the street must have some kind of perception that I am to be married the day after to-morrow. The Surrogate knows me when I go down to be sworn; and disposes of me easily, as if there were a Masonic understanding between us. Traddles is not at all wanted, but is in attendance as my general backer.

"I hope the next time you come here, my dear fellow," I say to Traddles, "it will be on the same errand for yourself. And I hope it will be soon."

"Thank you for your good wishes, my dear Copperfield," he replies. "I hope so too. It's a satisfaction to know that she'll wait for me any length of time, and that she really is the dearest girl—"

"When are you to meet her at the coach?" I asked.

"At seven," says Traddles, looking at his plain old silver watch—the very watch he once took a wheel out of at school, to make a water-mill. "That is about Miss Wickfield's time, is it not?"

"A little earlier. Her time is half-past eight."

"I assure you, my dear boy," says Traddles, "I'm almost as pleased as if I were going to be married myself, to think that this event is coming to such a happy termination. And really the great friendship and consideration of personally associating Sophy with the joyful occasion, and inviting her to be a bridesmaid in conjunction with Miss Wickfield, demands my warmest thanks. I am extremely sensible of it."

I hear him, and shake hands with him; and we

talk, and walk, and dine, and so on, but I don't believe it. Nothing is real.

Sophy arrives at the house of Dora's aunts in due course. She has the most agreeable of faces, — not absolutely beautiful, but extraordinarily pleasant, — and is one of the most genial, unaffected, frank, engaging creatures I have ever seen. Traddles presents her to us with great pride; and rubs his hands for ten minutes by the clock, with every individual hair upon his head standing on tiptoe, when I congratulate him in a corner on his choice.

I have brought Agnes from the Canterbury coach, and her cheerful and beautiful face is among us for the second time. Agnes has a great liking for Traddles, and it is capital to see them meet, and to observe the glory of Traddles as he commends the dearest girl in the world to her acquaintance.

Still I don't believe it. We have a delightful evening, and are supremely happy: but I don't believe it yet. I can't collect myself. I can't check off my happiness as it takes place. I feel in a misty and unsettled kind of state; as if I had got up very early in the morning a week or two ago, and had never been to bed since. I can't make out when yesterday was. I seem to have been carrying the license about, in my pocket, many months.

Next day, too, when we all go in a flock to see the house — our house — Dora's and mine — I am quite unable to regard myself as its master. I seem to be there by permission of somebody else. I half expect the real master to come home presently, and say he is glad to see me. Such a beautiful little house as it is, with everything so bright and new; with the flowers on the carpets looking as if freshly

gathered, and the green leaves on the paper as if they had just come out; with the spotless muslin curtains, and the blushing rose-colored furniture, and Dora's garden hat with the blue ribbon—do I remember, now, how I loved her in such another hat when I first knew her?—already hanging on its little peg; the guitar-case quite at home on its heels in a corner; and everybody tumbling over Jip's Pagoda, which is much too big for the establishment.

Another happy evening, quite as unreal as all the rest of it, and I steal into the usual room before going away. Dora is not there. I suppose they have not done trying on yet. Miss Lavinia peeps in, and tells me mysteriously that she will not be long. She is rather long, notwithstanding: but by and by I hear a rustling at the door, and some one taps.

I say, "Come in!" but some one taps again.

I go to the door, wondering who it is; there, I meet a pair of bright eyes, and a blushing face; they are Dora's eyes and face, and Miss Lavinia has dressed her in to-morrow's dress, bonnet and all, for me to see. I take my little wife to my heart; and Miss Lavinia gives a little scream because I tumble the bonnet, and Dora laughs and cries at once, because I am so pleased; and I believe it less than ever.

"Do you think it pretty, Doady?" says Dora.

Pretty! I should rather think I did.

"And are you sure you like me very much?" says Dora.

The topic is fraught with such danger to the bonnet, that Miss Lavinia gives another little scream, and begs me to understand that Dora is only to be

looked at, and on no account to be touched. So Dora stands in a delightful state of confusion for a minute or two, to be admired; and then takes off her bonnet — looking so natural without it! — and runs away with it in her hand; and comes dancing down again in her old familiar dress, and asks Jip if I have got a beautiful little wife, and whether he'll forgive her for being married, and kneels down to make him stand upon the Cookery Book for the last time in her single life.

I go home, more incredulous than ever, to a lodging that I have had by; and get up very early in the morning, to ride to the Highgate Road, and fetch my aunt.

I have never seen my aunt in such state. She is dressed in lavender-colored silk, and has a white bonnet on, and is amazing. Janet has dressed her, and is there to look at me. Peggotty is ready to go to church, intending to behold the ceremony from the gallery. Mr. Dick, who is to give my darling to me at the altar, has had his hair curled. Traddles, whom I have taken up by appointment at the turnpike, presents a dazzling combination of cream and light blue; and both he and Mr. Dick have a general effect about them of being all gloves.

No doubt I see this, because I know it is so; but I am astray, and seem to see nothing. Nor do I believe anything whatever. Still, as we drive along in an open carriage, this fairy marriage is real enough to fill me with a sort of wondering pity for the unfortunate people who have no part in it, but are sweeping out the shops, and going to their daily occupations.

My aunt sits with my hand in hers all the way.

When we stop a little way short of the church, to put down Peggotty, whom we have brought on the box, she gives it a squeeze, and me a kiss.

"God bless you, Trot! My own boy never could be dearer. I think of poor dear Baby this morning."

"So do I. And of all I owe to you, dear aunt."

"Tut, child!" says my aunt; and gives her hand in overflowing cordiality to Traddles, who then gives his to Mr. Dick, who then gives his to me, who then give mine to Traddles, and then we come to the church door.

The church is calm enough, I am sure; but it might be a steam-power loom in full action, for any sedative effect it has on me. I am too far gone for that.

The rest is all a more or less incoherent dream.

A dream of their coming in with Dora; of the pew-owner arranging us, like a drill-sergeant, before the altar rails; of my wondering, even then, why pew-openers must always be the most disagreeable females procurable, and whether there is any religious dread of a disastrous infection of good humor which renders it indispensable to set those vessels of vinegar upon the road to Heaven.

Of the clergyman and clerk appearing; of a few boatmen and some other people strolling in; of an ancient mariner behind me, strongly flavoring the church with rum; of the service beginning in a deep voice, and our all being very attentive.

Of Miss Lavinia, who acts as a semi-auxiliary bridesmaid, being the first to cry, and of her doing homage (as I take it) to the memory of Pidger in sobs; of Miss Clarissa applying a smelling-bottle;



of Agnes taking care of Dora ; of my aunt endeavoring to represent herself as a model of sternness, with tears rolling down her face ; of little Dora trembling very much, and making her responses in faint whispers.

Of our kneeling down together, side by side ; of Dora's trembling less and less, but always clasping Agnes by the hand ; of the service being got through quietly and gravely ; of our all looking at each other in an April state of smiles and tears when it is over ; of my young wife being hysterical in the vestry, and crying for her poor papa, her dear papa.

Of her soon cheering up again, and our signing the register all round. Of my going into the gallery for Peggotty to bring *her* to sign it ; of Peggotty's hugging me in a corner, and telling me she saw my own dear mother married ; of it being over, and our going away.

Of my walking so proudly and lovingly down the aisle with my sweet wife upon my arm, through a mist of half-seen people, pulpits, monuments, pews, fonts, organs, and church windows, in which there flutter faint airs of association with my childish church at home, so long ago.

Of their whispering, as we pass, what a youthful couple we are, and what a pretty little wife she is. Of our all being so merry and talkative in the carriage going back. Of Sophy telling us that when she saw Traddles (whom I had intrusted with the license) asked for it, she almost fainted, having been convinced that he would contrive to lose it, or to have his pocket picked. Of Agnes laughing gayly ; and of Dora being so fond of Agnes that she will

not be separated from her, but still keeps her hand.

Of there being a breakfast with an abundance of things, pretty and substantial, to eat and drink, whereof I partake, as I should do in any other dream, without the least perception of their flavor; eating and drinking, as I may say, nothing but love and marriage, and no more believing in the viands than in anything else.

Of my making a speech in the same dreamy fashion, without having an idea of what I want to say, beyond such as may be comprehended in the full conviction that I haven't said it. Of our being very sociably and simply happy (always in a dream, though); and of Jip's having wedding-cake, and its not agreeing with him afterwards.

Of the pair of hired post-horses being ready, and of Dora's going away to change her dress. Of my aunt and Miss Clarissa remaining with us; and our walking in the garden; and my aunt, who has made quite a speech at breakfast touching Dora's aunts, being mightily amused with herself, but a little proud of it too.

Of Dora's being ready, and of Miss Lavinia's hovering about her, loath to lose the pretty toy that has given her so much pleasant occupation. Of Dora's making a long series of surprised discoveries that she has forgotten all sorts of little things; and of everybody's running everywhere to fetch them.

Of their all closing about Dora, when at last she begins to say good-by, looking, with their bright colors and ribbons, like a bed of flowers. Of my darling being almost smothered among the flowers,

and coming out, laughing and crying both together, to my jealous arms.

Of my wanting to carry Jip (who is to go along with us), and Dora's saying no, that she must carry him, or else he'll think she don't like him any more, now she is married, and will break his heart. Of our going, arm in arm, and Dora stopping and looking back, and saying, "If I have ever been cross or ungrateful to anybody, don't remember it!" and bursting into tears.

Of her waving her little hand, and our going away once more. Of her once more stopping and looking back, and hurrying to Agnes, and giving Agnes, above all the others, her last kisses and farewells. We drive away together, and I awake from the dream. I believe it at last. It is my dear, dear little wife beside me whom I love so well!

"Are you happy now, you foolish boy?" says Dora, "and sure you don't repent?"

I have stood aside to see the phantoms of those days go by me. They are gone, and I resume the journey of my story.

CHAPTER V.

OUR HOUSEKEEPING.

It was a strange condition of things, the honeymoon being over, and the bridesmaids gone home, when I found myself sitting down in my own small house with Dora; quite thrown out of employment, as I may say, in respect of the delicious old occupation of making love.

It seemed such an extraordinary thing to have Dora always there. It was so unaccountable not to be obliged to go out to see her, not to have any occasion to be tormenting myself about her, not to have to write to her, not to be scheming and devising opportunities of being alone with her. Sometimes of an evening, when I looked up from my writing, and saw her seated opposite, I would lean back in my chair, and think how queer it was that there we were, alone together as a matter of course—nobody's business any more—all the romance of our engagement put away upon a shelf, to rust—no one to please but one another—one another to please for life.

When there was a debate, and I was kept out very late, it seemed so strange to me, as I was walking home, to think that Dora was at home! It was

such a wonderful thing, at first, to have her coming softly down to talk to me as I ate my supper. It was such a stupendous thing to know for certain that she put her hair in papers. It was altogether such an astonishing event to see her do it!

I doubt whether two young birds could have known less about keeping house than I and my pretty Dora did. We had a servant, of course. She kept house for us. I have still a latent belief that she must have been Mrs. Crupp's daughter in disguise, we had such an awful time of it with Mary Anne.

Her name was Paragon. Her nature was represented to us, when we engaged her, as being feebly expressed in her name. She had a written character, as large as a proclamation; and, according to this document, could do everything of a domestic nature that ever I heard of, and a great many things that I never did hear of. She was a woman in the prime of life; of a severe countenance; and subject (particularly in the arms) to a sort of perpetual measles or fiery rash. She had a cousin in the Life Guards, with such long legs that he looked like the afternoon shadow of somebody else. His shell-jacket was as much too little for him as he was too big for the premises. He made the cottage smaller than it need have been, by being so very much out of proportion to it. Besides which, the walls were not thick, and, whenever he passed the evening at our house, we always knew of it by hearing one continual growl in the kitchen.

Our treasure was warranted sober and honest. I am therefore willing to believe that she was in a fit when we found her under the boiler; and that the

deficient teaspoons were attributable to the dust-man.

But she preyed upon our minds dreadfully. We felt our inexperience, and were unable to help ourselves. We should have been at her mercy, if she had had any; but she was a remorseless woman, and had none. She was the cause of our first little quarrel.

"My dearest life," I said one day to Dora, "do you think Mary Anne has any idea of time?"

"Why, Doady?" inquired Dora, looking up innocently from her drawing.

"My love, because it's five, and we were to have dined at four."

Dora glanced wistfully at the clock, and hinted that she thought it was too fast.

"On the contrary, my love," said I, referring to my watch, "it's a few minutes too slow."

My little wife came and sat upon my knee, to coax me to be quiet, and drew a line with her pencil down the middle of my nose; but I couldn't dine off that, though it was very agreeable.

"Don't you think, my dear," said I, "it would be better for you to remonstrate with Mary Anne?"

"Oh no, please! I couldn't, Doady!" said Dora.

"Why not, my love?" I gently asked.

"Oh, because I am such a little goose," said Dora, "and she knows I am!"

I thought this sentiment so incompatible with the establishment of any system of check on Mary Anne, that I frowned a little.

"Oh, what ugly wrinkles in my bad boy's forehead!" said Dora, and still being on my knee, she traced them with her pencil; putting it to her

rosy lips to make it mark blacker, and working at my forehead with a quaint little mockery of being industrious, that quite delighted me in spite of myself.

"There's a good child," said Dora; "it makes its face so much prettier to laugh."

"But my love —" said I.

"No, no! please!" cried Dora, with a kiss, "don't be a naughty Blue Beard! Don't be serious!"

"My precious wife," said I, "we must be serious sometimes. Come! Sit down on this chair, close beside me! Give me the pencil! There! Now let us talk sensibly. You know, dear," — what a little hand it was to hold, and what a tiny wedding-ring it was to see! — "you know, my love, it is not exactly comfortable to have to go out without one's dinner. Now, is it?"

"N — n — no!" replied Dora faintly.

"My love, how you tremble!"

"Because I know you're going to scold me," exclaimed Dora in a piteous voice.

"My sweet, I am only going to reason."

"Oh, but reasoning is worse than scolding!" exclaimed Dora in despair. "I didn't marry to be reasoned with. If you meant to reason with such a poor little thing as I am, you ought to have told me so, you cruel boy!"

I tried to pacify Dora, but she turned away her face, and shook her curls from side to side, and said, "You cruel, cruel boy!" so many times, that I really did not exactly know what to do: so I took a few turns up and down the room in my uncertainty, and came back again.

"Dora, my darling!"

"No, I am not your darling. Because you *must* be sorry that you married me, or else you wouldn't reason with me!" returned Dora.

I felt so injured by the inconsequential nature of this charge, that it gave me courage to be grave.

"Now, my own Dora," said I, "you are very childish, and are talking nonsense. You must remember, I am sure, that I was obliged to go out yesterday when dinner was half over: and that, the day before, I was made quite unwell by being obliged to eat underdone veal in a hurry; to-day, I don't dine at all—and I am afraid to say how long we waited for breakfast—and *then* the water didn't boil. I don't mean to reproach you, my dear, but this is not comfortable."

"Oh, you cruel, cruel boy, to say I am a disagreeable wife!" cried Dora.

"Now, my dear Dora, you must know that I never said that!"

"You said I wasn't comfortable!" said Dora.

"I said the housekeeping was not comfortable."

"It's exactly the same thing!" cried Dora. And she evidently thought so, for she wept most grievously.

I took another turn across the room, full of love for my pretty wife, and distracted by self-accusatory inclinations to knock my head against the door. I sat down again and said, —

"I am not blaming you, Dora. We have both a great deal to learn. I am only trying to show you, my dear, that you *must*, you really *must*" (I was resolved not to give this up) — "accustom yourself to look after Mary Anne. Likewise to act a little for yourself, and me."

"I wonder, I do, at your making such ungrateful speeches," sobbed Dora. "When you know that the other day, when you said you would like a little bit of fish, I went out myself, miles and miles, and ordered it, to surprise you."

"And it was very kind of you, my own darling," said I. "I felt it so much that I wouldn't on any account have even mentioned that you bought a Salmon — which was too much for two. Or that it cost one pound six — which was more than we can afford."

"You enjoyed it very much," sobbed Dora. "And you said I was a Mouse."

"And I'll say so again, my love," I returned, "a thousand times!"

But I had wounded Dora's soft little heart, and she was not to be comforted. She was so pathetic in her sobbing and bewailing, that I felt as if I had said I don't know what to hurt her. I was obliged to hurry away; I was kept out late; and I felt all night such pangs of remorse as made me miserable. I had the conscience of an assassin, and was haunted by a vague sense of enormous wickedness.

It was two or three hours past midnight when I got home. I found my aunt, in our house, sitting up for me.

"Is anything the matter, aunt?" said I, alarmed.

"Nothing, Trot," she replied. "Sit down, sit down. Little Blossom has been rather out of spirits, and I have been keeping her company. That's all."

I leaned my head upon my hand; and felt more sorry and downcast, as I sat looking at the fire, than I could have supposed possible so soon after the fulfilment of my brightest hopes. As I sat think-

ing, I happened to meet my aunt's eyes, which were resting on my face. There was an anxious expression in them, but it cleared directly.

"I assure you, aunt," said I, "I have been quite unhappy myself all night, to think of Dora's being so. But I had no other intention than to speak to her tenderly and lovingly about our home affairs."

My aunt nodded encouragement.

"You must have patience, Trot," said she.

"Of course. Heaven knows I don't mean to be unreasonable, aunt."

"No, no," said my aunt. "But Little Blossom is a very tender little blossom, and the wind must be gentle with her."

I thanked my good aunt, in my heart, for her tenderness towards my wife; and I was sure that she knew I did.

"Don't you think, aunt," said I, after some further contemplation of the fire, "that you could advise and counsel Dora a little, for our mutual advantage, now and then?"

"Trot," returned my aunt with some emotion, "no! Don't ask me such a thing!"

Her tone was so very earnest that I raised my eyes in surprise.

"I look back on my life, child," said my aunt, "and I think of some who are in their graves, with whom I might have been on kinder terms. If I judged harshly of other people's mistakes in marriage, it may have been because I had bitter reason to judge harshly of my own. Let that pass. I have been a grumpy, frumpy, wayward sort of a woman, a good many years. I am still, and I always shall be. But you and I have done one another

some good, Trot, — at all events, you have done me good, my dear; and division must not come between us at this time of day."

"Division between *us*!" cried I.

"Child, child!" said my aunt, smoothing her dress, "how soon it might come between us, or how unhappy I might make our Little Blossom, if I meddled in anything, a prophet couldn't say. I want our pet to like me, and be as gay as a butterfly. Remember your own home in that second marriage; and never do both me and her the injury you have hinted at!"

I comprehended, at once, that my aunt was right; and I comprehended the full extent of her generous feeling towards my dear wife.

"These are early days, Trot," she pursued, "and Rome was not built in a day, nor in a year. You have chosen freely for yourself;" a cloud passed over her face for a moment, I thought; "and you have chosen a very pretty and a very affectionate creature. It will be your duty, and it will be your pleasure too—of course I know that; I am not delivering a lecture—to estimate her (as you chose her) by the qualities she has, and not by the qualities she may not have. The latter you must develop in her, if you can. And if you cannot, child,"—here my aunt rubbed her nose,— "you must just accustom yourself to do without 'em. But remember, my dear, your future is between you two. No one can assist you; you are to work it out for yourselves. This is marriage, Trot; and Heaven bless you both in it, for a pair of babes in the wood as you are!"

My aunt said this in a sprightly way, and gave me a kiss to ratify the blessing.

"Now," said she, "light my little lantern, and see me into my bandbox by the garden path;" for there was a communication between our cottages in that direction. "Give Betsey Trotwood's love to Blossom when you come back; and whatever you do, Trot, never dream of setting Betsey up as a scarecrow, for, if *I* ever saw her in the glass, she's quite grim enough and gaunt enough in her private capacity!"

With this my aunt tied her head up in a handkerchief, with which she was accustomed to make a bundle of it on such occasions; and I escorted her home. As she stood in her garden, holding up her little lantern to light me back, I thought her observation of me had an anxious air again; but I was too much occupied in pondering on what she had said, and too much impressed — for the first time, in reality — by the conviction that Dora and I had indeed to work out our future for ourselves, and that no one could assist us, to take much notice of it.

Dora came stealing down in her little slippers to meet me, now that I was alone; and cried upon my shoulder, and said I had been hard-hearted and she had been naughty; and I said much the same thing in effect, I believe; and we made it up, and agreed that our first little difference was to be our last, and that we were never to have another if we lived a hundred years.

The next domestic trial we went through was the Ordeal of Servants. Mary Anne's cousin deserted into our coal-hole, and was brought out, to our great amazement, by a picket of his companions in arms, who took him away handcuffed in a procession that covered our front garden with ignominy. This nerved

me to get rid of Mary Anne, who went so mildly, on receipt of wages, that I was surprised, until I found out about the teaspoons, and also about the little sums she had borrowed in my name of the tradespeople without authority. After an interval of Mrs. Kidgerbury — the oldest inhabitant of Kentish Town, I believe, who went out charring, but was too feeble to execute her conceptions of that art — we found another treasure, who was one of the most amiable of women, but who generally made a point of falling either up or down the kitchen stairs with the tray, and almost plunged into the parlor, as into a bath, with the tea-things. The ravages committed by this unfortunate rendering her dismissal necessary, she was succeeded (with intervals of Mrs. Kidgerbury) by a long line of Incapables; terminating in a young person of genteel appearance, who went to Greenwich Fair in Dora's bonnet. After whom I remember nothing but an average equality of failure.

Everybody we had anything to do with seemed to cheat us. Our appearance in a shop was a signal for the damaged goods to be brought out immediately. If we bought a lobster, it was full of water. All our meat turned out to be tough, and there was hardly any crust to our loaves. In search of the principle on which joints ought to be roasted, to be roasted enough, and not too much, I myself referred to the Cookery Book, and found it there established as the allowance of a quarter of an hour to every pound, and say a quarter over. But the principle always failed us by some curious fatality, and we never could hit any medium between redness and cinders.

I had reason to believe that, in accomplishing

these failures, we incurred a far greater expense than if we had achieved a series of triumphs. It appeared to me, on looking over the tradesmen's books, as if we might have kept the basement story paved with butter, such was the extensive scale of our consumption of that article. I don't know whether the Excise returns of the period may have exhibited any increase in the demand for pepper; but if our performances did not affect the market, I should say several families must have left off using it. And the most wonderful fact of all was, that we never had anything in the house.

As to the washerwoman pawning the clothes, and coming in a state of penitent intoxication to apologize, I suppose that might have happened several times to anybody. Also the chimney on fire, the parish engine, and perjury on the part of the Beadle. But I apprehend that we were personally unfortunate in engaging a servant with a taste for cordials, who swelled our running account for porter at the public-house by such inexplicable items as, "Quartern rum shrub (Mrs. C.)" "Half-quartern gin and cloves (Mrs. C.)" "Glass rum and peppermint (Mrs. C.)" — the parenthesis always referring to Dora, who was supposed, it appeared on explanation, to have imbibed the whole of these refreshments.

One of our first feats in the housekeeping way was a little dinner to Traddles. I met him in town, and asked him to walk out with me that afternoon. He readily consenting, I wrote to Dora, saying I would bring him home. It was pleasant weather, and on the road we made my domestic happiness the theme of conversation.



Traddles was very full of it; and said that, picturing himself with such a home, and Sophy waiting and preparing for him, he could think of nothing wanting to complete his bliss.

I could not have wished for a prettier little wife at the opposite end of the table, but I certainly could have wished, when we sat down, for a little more room. I did not know how it was, but though there were only two of us, we were at once always cramped for room, and yet had always room enough to lose everything in. I suspect it may have been because nothing had a place of its own, except Jip's pagoda, which invariably blocked up the main thoroughfare. On the present occasion, Traddles was so hemmed in by the pagoda and the guitar-case, and Dora's flower-painting, and my writing-table, that I had serious doubts of the possibility of his using his knife and fork; but he protested, with his own good humor, "Oceans of room, Copperfield! I assure you, Oceans!"

There was another thing I could have wished, namely, that Jip had never been encouraged to walk about the table-cloth during dinner. I began to think there was something disorderly in his being there at all, even if he had not been in the habit of putting his foot in the salt or the melted butter. On this occasion he seemed to think he was introduced expressly to keep Traddles at bay; and he barked at my old friend, and made short runs at his plate, with such undaunted pertinacity, that he may be said to have engrossed the conversation.

However, as I knew how tender-hearted my dear Dora was, and how sensitive she would be to any slight upon her favorite, I hinted no objection. For

similar reasons I made no allusion to the skirmishing plates upon the floor; or to the disreputable appearance of the casters, which were all at sixes and sevens, and looked drunk; or to the further blockade of Traddles by wandering vegetable dishes and jugs. I could not help wondering in my own mind, as I contemplated the boiled leg of mutton before me, previous to carving it, how it came to pass that our joints of meat were of such extraordinary shapes — and whether our butcher contracted for all the deformed sheep that came into the world; but I kept my reflections to myself.

“My love,” said I to Dora, “what have you got in that dish?”

I could not imagine why Dora had been making tempting little faces at me, as if she wanted to kiss me.

“Oysters, dear,” said Dora timidly.

“Was that *your* thought?” said I, delighted.

“Ye-yes, Doady,” said Dora.

“There never was a happier one!” I exclaimed, laying down the carving knife and fork. “There is nothing Traddles likes so much!”

“Ye-yes, Doady,” said Dora, “and so I bought a beautiful little barrel of them, and the man said they were very good. But I — I am afraid there’s something the matter with them. They don’t seem right.” Here Dora shook her head, and diamonds twinkled in her eyes.

“They are only opened in both shells,” said I. “Take the top one off, my love.”

“But it won’t come off,” said Dora, trying very hard, and looking very much distressed.

“Do you know, Copperfield,” said Traddles, cheer-

fully examining the dish, "I think it is in consequence — they are capital oysters, but I *think* it is in consequence — of their never having been opened."

They never had been opened; and we had no oyster knives — and couldn't have used them if we had; so we looked at the oysters, and ate the mutton. At least, we ate as much of it as was done, and made up with capers. If I had permitted him, I am satisfied that Traddles would have made a perfect savage of himself, and eaten a plateful of raw meat, to express enjoyment of the repast; but I would hear of no such immolation on the altar of friendship; and we had a course of bacon instead; there happening, by good fortune, to be cold bacon in the larder.

My poor little wife was in such affliction when she thought I should be annoyed, and in such a state of joy when she found I was not, that the discomforture I had subdued very soon vanished, and we passed a happy evening; Dora sitting with her arm on my chair, while Traddles and I discussed a glass of wine, and taking every opportunity of whispering in my ear that it was so good of me not to be a cruel, cross old boy. By and by she made tea for us; which it was so pretty to see her do, as if she was busying herself with a set of doll's tea-things, that I was not particular about the quality of the beverage. Then Traddles and I played a game or two at cribbage; and Dora singing to the guitar the while, it seemed to me as if our courtship and marriage were a tender dream of mine, and the night when I first listened to her voice were not yet over.

When Traddles went away, and I came back into

the parlor from seeing him out, my wife planted her chair close to mine, and sat down by my side.

"I am very sorry," she said. "Will you try to teach me, Doady?"

"I must teach myself first, Dora," said I. "I am as bad as you, love."

"Ah! but you can learn," she returned; "and you are a clever, clever man!"

"Nonsense, Mouse!" said I.

"I wish," resumed my wife after a long silence, "that I could have gone down into the country for a whole year, and lived with Agnes!"

Her hands were clasped upon my shoulder, and her chin rested on them, and her blue eyes looked quietly into mine.

"Why so?" I asked.

"I think she might have improved me, and I think I might have learnt from *her*," said Dora.

"All in good time, my love. Agnes has had her father to take care of for these many years, you should remember. Even when she was quite a child, she was the Agnes whom we know," said I.

"Will you call me a name I want you to call me?" inquired Dora, without moving.

"What is it?" I asked with a smile.

"It's a stupid name," she said, shaking her curls for a moment. "Child-wife."

I laughingly asked my child-wife what her fancy was in desiring to be so called? She answered without moving, otherwise than as the arm I twined about her may have brought her blue eyes nearer to me, —

"I don't mean, you silly fellow, that you should use the name instead of Dora. I only mean that

you should think of me that way. When you are going to be angry with me, say to yourself, 'It's only my child-wife!' When I am very disappointing, say, 'I knew, a long time ago, that she would make but a child-wife!' When you miss what I should like to be, and I think can never be, say, 'Still my foolish child-wife loves me!' For indeed I do."

I had not been serious with her; having no idea, until now, that she was serious herself. But her affectionate nature was so happy in what I now said to her with my whole heart, that her face became a laughing one before her glittering eyes were dry. She was soon my child-wife indeed; sitting down on the floor outside the Chinese house, ringing all the little bells one after another, to punish Jip for his recent bad behavior; while Jip lay blinking in the doorway with his head out, even too lazy to be teased.

This appeal of Dora's made a strong impression on me. I look back on the time I write of; I invoke the innocent figure, that I dearly loved, to come out from the mists and shadows of the past, and turn its gentle head towards me once again; and I can still declare that this one little speech was constantly in my memory. I may not have used it to the best account; I was young and inexperienced; but I never turned a deaf ear to its artless pleading.

Dora told me, shortly afterwards, that she was going to be a wonderful housekeeper. Accordingly, she polished the tablets, pointed the pencil, bought an immense account book, carefully stitched up with a needle and thread all the leaves of the Cookery Book which Jip had torn, and made quite a desper-

ate little attempt "to be good," as she called it. But the figures had the old obstinate propensity — they *would not* add up. When she had entered two or three laborious items in the account book, Jip would walk over the page, wagging his tail, and smear them all out. Her own little right-hand middle finger got steeped to the very bone in ink; and I think that was the only decided result obtained.

Sometimes of an evening, when I was at home and at work — for I wrote a good deal now, and was beginning in a small way to be known as a writer — I would lay down my pen, and watch my child-wife trying to be good. First of all, she would bring out the immense account book, and lay it down upon the table, with a deep sigh. Then she would open it at the place where Jip had made it illegible last night, and call Jip up to look at his misdeeds. This would occasion a diversion in Jip's favor, and some inking of his nose, perhaps, as a penalty. Then she would tell Jip to lie down on the table instantly, "like a lion" — which was one of his tricks, though I cannot say the likeness was striking — and, if he were in an obedient humor, he would obey. Then she would take up a pen, and begin to write, and find a hair in it. Then she would take up another pen, and begin to write, and find that it spluttered. Then she would take up another pen, and begin to write, and say in a low voice, "Oh, it's a talking pen, and will disturb Doady!" And then she would give it up as a bad job, and put the account book away, after pretending to crush the lion with it.

Or, if she were in a very sedate and serious state of mind, she would sit down with the tablets, and a little basket of bills and other documents, which

looked more like curl-papers than anything else, and endeavor to get some result out of them. After severely comparing one with another, and making entries on the tablets, and blotting them out, and counting all the fingers of her left hand over and over again, backwards and forwards, she would be so vexed and discouraged, and would look so unhappy, that it gave me pain to see her bright face clouded—and for me!—and I would go softly to her, and say, —

“What’s the matter, Dora?”

Dora would look up hopelessly, and reply, “They won’t come right. They make my head ache so. And they won’t do anything I want!”

Then I would say, “Now let us try together. Let me show you, Dora.”

Then I would commence a practical demonstration, to which Dora would pay profound attention, perhaps for five minutes; when she would begin to be dreadfully tired, and would lighten the subject by curling my hair, or trying the effect of my face with my shirt-collar turned down. If I tacitly checked this playfulness, and persisted, she would look so scared and disconsolate, as she became more and more bewildered, that the remembrance of her natural gayety when I first strayed into her path, and of her being my child-wife, would come reproachfully upon me; and I would lay the pencil down and call for the guitar.

I had a great deal of work to do, and had many anxieties, but the same considerations made me keep them to myself. I am far from sure, now, that it was right to do this, but I did it for my child-wife’s sake. I search my breast, and I commit its secrets,

if I know them, without any reservation to this paper. The old unhappy loss or want of something had, I am conscious, some place in my heart; but not to the imbitterment of my life. When I walked alone in the fine weather, and thought of the summer days when all the air had been filled with my boyish enchantment, I did miss something of the realization of my dreams; but I thought it was a softened glory of the Past, which nothing could have thrown upon the present time. I did feel sometimes, for a little while, that I could have wished my wife had been my counsellor: had had more character and purpose, to sustain me and improve me by; had been endowed with power to fill up the void which somewhere seemed to be about me; but I felt as if this were an unearthly consummation of my happiness, that never had been meant to be, and never could have been.

I was a boyish husband as to years. I had known the softening influence of no other sorrows or experiences than those recorded in these leaves. If I did any wrong, as I may have done much, I did it in mistaken love, and in my want of wisdom. I write the exact truth. It would avail me nothing to extenuate it now.

Thus it was that I took upon myself the toils and cares of our life, and had no partner in them. We lived much as before, in reference to our scrambling household arrangements; but I had got used to those, and Dora, I was pleased to see, was seldom vexed now. She was bright and cheerful in the old childish way, loved me dearly, and was happy with her old trifles.

When the debates were heavy — I mean as to

length, not quality, for in the last respect they were not often otherwise — and I went home late, Dora would never rest when she heard my footsteps, but would always come downstairs to meet me. When my evenings were unoccupied by the pursuit for which I had qualified myself with so much pains, and I was engaged in writing at home, she would sit quietly near me, however late the hour, and be so mute, that I would often think she had dropped asleep. But generally, when I raised my head, I saw her blue eyes looking at me with the quiet attention of which I have already spoken.

“Oh, what a weary boy!” said Dora one night when I met her eyes as I was shutting up my desk.

“What a weary girl!” said I. “That’s more to the purpose. You must go to bed another time, my love. It’s far too late for you.”

“No, don’t send me to bed!” pleaded Dora, coming to my side. “Pray don’t do that!”

“Dora!”

To my amazement she was sobbing on my neck.

“Not well, my dear! not happy!”

“Yes! quite well, and very happy!” said Dora. “But say you’ll let me stop and see you write.”

“Why, what a sight for such bright eyes at midnight!” I replied.

“Are they bright, though?” returned Dora, laughing. “I’m so glad they’re bright.”

“Little Vanity!” said I.

But it was not vanity; it was only harmless delight in my admiration. I knew that very well before she told me so.

“If you think them pretty, say I may always stop and see you write!” said Dora. “*Do* you think them pretty?”

"Very pretty."

"Then let me always stop and see you write."

"I am afraid that won't improve their brightness, Dora."

"Yes, it will! Because, 'you clever boy, you'll not forget me then, while you are full of silent fancies. Will you mind it, if I say something very, very silly?—more than usual?" inquired Dora, peeping over my shoulder into my face.

"What wonderful thing is that?" said I.

"Please let me hold the pens," said Dora. "I want to have something to do with all those many hours when you are so industrious. May I hold the pens?"

The remembrance of her pretty joy, when I said Yes, brings tears into my eyes. The next time I sat down to write, and regularly afterwards, she sat in her old place, with a spare bundle of pens at her side. Her triumph in this connection with my work, and her delight when I wanted a new pen—which I very often feigned to do—suggested to me a new way of pleasing my child-wife. I occasionally made a pretence of wanting a page or two of manuscript copied. Then Dora was in her glory. The preparations she made for this great work, the aprons she put on, the bibs she borrowed from the kitchen to keep off the ink, the time she took, the innumerable stoppages she made to have a laugh with Jip as if he understood it all, her conviction that her work was incomplete unless she signed her name at the end, and the way in which she would bring it to me, like a school copy, and then, when I praised it, clasp me round the neck, are touching recollections to me, simple as they might appear to other men.

She took possession of the keys soon after this, and went jingling about the house with the whole bunch in a little basket, tied to her slender waist. I seldom found that the places to which they belonged were locked, or that they were of any use except as a plaything for Jip — but Dora was pleased, and that pleased me. She was quite satisfied that a good deal was effected by this make-believe of housekeeping; and was as merry as if we had been keeping a baby-house for a joke.

So we went on. Dora was hardly less affectionate to my aunt than to me, and often told her of the time when she was afraid she was a “cross old thing.” I never saw my aunt unbend more systematically to any one. She courted Jip, though Jip never responded; listened, day after day, to the guitar, though I am afraid she had no taste for music; never attacked the Incapables, though the temptation must have been severe; went wonderful distances on foot to purchase, as surprises, any trifles that she found out Dora wanted; and never came in by the garden, and missed her from the room, but she would call out, at the foot of the stairs, in a voice that sounded cheerfully all over the house, —

“Where’s Little Blossom?”

CHAPTER VI.

MR. DICK FULFILLS MY AUNT'S PREDICTIONS.

It was some time, now, since I had left the Doctor. Living in his neighborhood, I saw him frequently; and we all went to his house on two or three occasions to dinner or tea. The Old Soldier was in permanent quarters under the Doctor's roof. She was exactly the same as ever, and the same immortal butterflies hovered over her cap.

Like some other mothers whom I have known in the course of my life, Mrs. Markleham was far more fond of pleasure than her daughter was. She required a great deal of amusement, and, like a deep old soldier, pretended, in consulting her own inclinations, to be devoting herself to her child. The Doctor's desire that Annie should be entertained was, therefore, particularly acceptable to this excellent parent; who expressed unqualified approval of his discretion.

I have no doubt, indeed, that she probed the Doctor's wound without knowing it. Meaning nothing but a certain matured frivolity and selfishness, not always inseparable from full-blown years, I think she confirmed him in his fear that he was a constraint upon his young wife, and that there was no

congeniality of feeling between them, by so strongly commending his design of lightening the road of her life.

"My dear soul," she said to him one day when I was present, "you know there is no doubt it would be a little poky for Annie to be always shut up here."

The doctor nodded his benevolent head.

"When she comes to her mother's age," said Mrs. Markleham, with a flourish of her fan, "then it'll be another thing. You might put *ME* into a Jail, with genteel society and a rubber, and I should never care to come out. But I am not Annie, you know; and Annie is not her mother."

"Surely, surely," said the Doctor.

"You are the best of creatures — no, I beg your pardon!" for the Doctor made a gesture of deprecation, "I must say before your face, as I always say behind your back, you are the best of creatures; but of course you don't — now do you? — enter into the same pursuits and fancies as Annie?"

"No," said the Doctor in a sorrowful tone.

"No, of course not," retorted the Old Soldier. "Take your Dictionary, for example. What a useful work a Dictionary is! What a necessary work! The meanings of words! Without Doctor Johnson, or somebody of that sort, we might have been at this present moment calling an Italian-iron a bedstead. But we can't expect a Dictionary — especially when it's making — to interest Annie, can we?"

The Doctor shook his head.

"And that's why I *so* much approve," said Mrs. Markleham, tapping him on the shoulder with her

shut-up fan, "of your thoughtfulness. It shows that you don't expect, as many elderly people do expect, old heads on young shoulders. You have studied Annie's character, and you understand it. *That's* what I find so charming!"

Even the calm and patient face of Doctor Strong expressed some little sense of pain, I thought, under the infliction of these compliments.

"Therefore, my dear Doctor," said the Soldier, giving him several affectionate taps, "you may command me at all times and seasons. Now, do understand that I am entirely at your service. I am ready to go with Annie to operas, concerts, exhibitions, all kinds of places; and you shall never find that I am tired. Duty, my dear Doctor, before every consideration in the universe!"

She was as good as her word. She was one of those people who can bear a great deal of pleasure, and she never flinched in her perseverance in the cause. She seldom got hold of the newspaper (which she settled herself down in the softest chair in the house to read through an eyeglass, every day, for two hours), but she found out something that she was certain Annie would like to see. It was in vain for Annie to protest that she was weary of such things. Her mother's remonstrance always was, "Now, dear Annie, I am sure you know better; and I must tell you, my love, that you are not making a proper return for the kindness of Doctor Strong."

This was usually said in the Doctor's presence, and appeared to me to constitute Annie's principal inducement for withdrawing her objections when she made any. But in general she resigned herself

to her mother, and went where the Old Soldier would.

It rarely happened now that Mr. Maldon accompanied them. Sometimes my aunt and Dora were invited to do so, and accepted the invitation. Sometimes Dora only was asked. The time had been when I should have been uneasy in her going; but reflection on what had passed that former night in the Doctor's study had made a change in my mistrust. I believed that the Doctor was right, and I had no worse suspicions.

My aunt rubbed her nose sometimes when she happened to be alone with me, and said she couldn't make it out; she wished they were happier; she didn't think our military friend (so she always called the Old Soldier) mended the matter at all. My aunt further expressed her opinion, "that if our military friend would cut off those butterflies, and give 'em to the chimney-sweepers for May-day, it would look like the beginning of something sensible on her part."

But her abiding reliance was on Mr. Dick. That man had evidently an idea in his head, she said; and if he could only once pen it up into a corner, which was his great difficulty, he would distinguish himself in some extraordinary manner.

Unconscious of this prediction, Mr. Dick continued to occupy precisely the same ground in reference to the Doctor and to Mrs. Strong. He seemed neither to advance nor to recede. He appeared to have settled into his original foundation, like a building; and I must confess that my faith in his ever moving was not much greater than if he had been a building.

But one night, when I had been married some months, Mr. Dick put his head into the parlor, where I was writing alone (Dora having gone out with my aunt to take tea with the two little birds), and said, with a significant cough, —

“You couldn’t speak to me without inconveniencing yourself, Trotwood, I am afraid?”

“Certainly, Mr. Dick,” said I; “come in!”

“Trotwood!” said Mr. Dick, laying his finger on the side of his nose, after he had shaken hands with me. “Before I sit down, I wish to make an observation. You know your aunt?”

“A little,” I replied.

“She is the most wonderful woman in the world, sir!”

After the delivery of this communication, which he shot out of himself as if he were loaded with it, Mr. Dick sat down, with greater gravity than usual, and looked at me.

“Now, boy,” said Mr. Dick, “I am going to put a question to you.”

“As many as you please,” said I.

“What do you consider me, sir?” asked Mr. Dick, folding his arms.

“A dear old friend,” said I.

“Thank you, Trotwood,” returned Mr. Dick, laughing, and reaching across in high glee to shake hands with me. “But I mean, boy,” resuming his gravity, “what do you consider me in this respect?” touching his forehead.

I was puzzled how to answer, but he helped me with a word.

“Weak?” said Mr. Dick.

“Well,” I replied dubiously. “Rather so.”

"Exactly!" cried Mr. Dick, who seemed quite enchanted by my reply. "That is, Trotwood, when they took some of the trouble out of you-know-who's head, and put it you know where, there was a —" Mr. Dick made his two hands revolve very fast about each other a great number of times, and then brought them into collision, and rolled them over and over one another, to express confusion. "There was that sort of thing done to me somehow? Eh?"

I nodded at him, and he nodded back again.

"In short, boy," said Mr. Dick, dropping his voice to a whisper, "I am simple."

I would have qualified that conclusion, but he stopped me.

"Yes, I am! She pretends I am not. She won't hear of it; but I am. I know I am. If she hadn't stood my friend, sir, I should have been shut up, to lead a dismal life these many years. But I'll provide for her! I never spend the copying money. I put it in a box. I have made a will. I'll leave it all to her. She shall be rich — noble!"

Mr. Dick took out his pocket-handkerchief, and wiped his eyes. He then folded it up with great care, pressed it smooth between his two hands, put it in his pocket, and seemed to put my aunt away with it.

"Now, you are a scholar, Trotwood," said Mr. Dick. "You are a fine scholar. You know what a learned man, what a great man, the Doctor is. You know what honor he has always done me. Not proud in his wisdom. Humble, humble — condescending even to poor Dick, who is simple and knows nothing. I have sent his name up, on a scrap of paper, to the kite, along the string, when

it has been in the sky, among the larks. The kite has been glad to receive it, sir, and the sky has been brighter with it."

I delighted him by saying most heartily, that the Doctor was deserving of our best respect and highest esteem.

"And his beautiful wife is a star," said Mr. Dick. "A shining star. I have seen her shine, sir. But," bringing his chair nearer, and laying one hand upon my knee — "clouds, sir, — clouds."

I answered the solicitude which his face expressed, by conveying the same expression into my own, and shaking my head.

"What clouds?" said Mr. Dick.

He looked so wistfully into my face, and was so anxious to understand, that I took great pains to answer him slowly and distinctly, as I might have entered on an explanation to a child.

"There is some unfortunate division between them," I replied. "Some unhappy cause of separation. A secret. It may be inseparable from the discrepancy in their years. It may have grown up out of almost nothing."

Mr. Dick, who told off every sentence with a thoughtful nod, paused when I had done, and sat considering, with his eyes upon my face, and his hand upon my knee.

"Doctor not angry with her, Trotwood?" he said after some time.

"No. Devoted to her."

"Then, I have got it, boy!" said Mr. Dick.

The sudden exultation with which he slapped me on the knee, and leaned back in his chair, with his eyebrows lifted up as high as he could possibly lift

them, made me think him farther out of his wits than ever. He became as suddenly grave again, and leaning forward as before, said — first respectfully taking out his pocket-handkerchief, as if it really did represent my aunt, —

“Most wonderful woman in the world, Trotwood. Why has *she* done nothing to set things right?”

“Too delicate and difficult a subject for such interference,” I replied.

“Fine scholar,” said Mr. Dick, touching me with his finger. “Why has *he* done nothing?”

“For the same reason,” I returned.

“Then, I have got it, boy!” said Mr. Dick. And he stood up before me, more exultingly than before, nodding his head, and striking himself repeatedly upon the breast, until one might have supposed that he had nearly nodded and struck all the breath out of his body.

“A poor fellow with a craze, sir,” said Mr. Dick, “a simpleton, a weak-minded person — present company, you know!” striking himself again — “may do what wonderful people may not do. I’ll bring them together, boy; I’ll try. They’ll not blame *me*. They’ll not object to *me*. They’ll not mind what *I* do, if it’s wrong. I’m only Mr. Dick. And who minds Dick? Dick’s nobody! Whoo!” He blew a slight, contemptuous breath, as if he blew himself away.

It was fortunate he had proceeded so far with his mystery, for we heard the coach stop at the little garden gate, which brought my aunt and Dora home.

“Not a word, boy!” he pursued in a whisper; “leave all the blame with Dick — simple Dick — mad Dick. I have been thinking, sir, for some

time, that I was getting it, and now I have got it. After what you have said to me, I am sure I have got it! All right!"

Not another word did Mr. Dick utter on the subject; but he made a very telegraph of himself for the next half-hour (to the great disturbance of my aunt's mind), to enjoin inviolable secrecy on me.

To my surprise, I heard no more about it for some two or three weeks, though I was sufficiently interested in the result of his endeavors; desiring a strange gleam of good sense—I say nothing of good feeling, for that he always exhibited—in the conclusion to which he had come. At last I began to believe that, in the flighty and unsettled state of his mind, he had either forgotten his intention or abandoned it.

One fair evening, when Dora was not inclined to go out, my aunt and I strolled up to the Doctor's cottage. It was autumn, when there were no debates to vex the evening air; and I remember how the leaves smelt like our garden at Blunderstone as we trod them under foot, and how the old, unhappy feeling seemed to go by on the sighing wind.

It was twilight when we reached the cottage. Mrs. Strong was just coming out of the garden, where Mr. Dick yet lingered, busy with his knife, helping the gardener to point some stakes. The Doctor was engaged with some one in his study; but the visitor would be gone directly, Mrs. Strong said, and begged us to remain and see him. We went into the drawing-room with her, and sat down by the darkening window. There was never any ceremony about the visits of such old friends and neighbors as we were.

We had not sat here many minutes, when Mrs. Markleham, who usually contrived to be in a fuss about something, came bustling in, with her newspaper in her hand, and said, out of breath, "My goodness gracious, Annie, why didn't you tell me there was some one in the study?"

"My dear mamma," she quietly returned, "how could I know that you desired the information?"

"Desired the information!" said Mrs. Markleham, sinking on the sofa. "I never had such a turn in all my life!"

"Have you been to the study, then, mamma?" asked Annie.

"*Been* to the study, my dear!" she returned emphatically. "Indeed I have! I came upon the amiable creature—if you'll imagine my feelings, Miss Trotwood and David—in the act of making his will."

Her daughter looked round from the window quickly.

"In the act, my dear Annie," repeated Mrs. Markleham, spreading the newspaper on her lap like a table-cloth, and patting her hands upon it, "of making his last Will and Testament. The foresight and affection of the dear! I must tell you how it was. I really must, in justice to the darling—for he is nothing less!—tell you how it was. Perhaps you know, Miss Trotwood, that there is never a candle lighted, in this house, until one's eyes are literally falling out of one's head with being stretched to read the paper. And that there is not a chair in this house, in which a paper can be what *I* call read, except one in the study. This took me to the study, where I saw a light. I opened the door. In

company with the dear Doctor were two professional people, evidently connected with the law, and they were all three standing at the table: the darling Doctor pen in hand. 'This simply expresses, then,' said the Doctor—Annie, my love, attend to the very words—'this simply expresses, then, gentlemen, the confidence I have in Mrs. Strong, and gives her all unconditionally?' One of the professional people replied, 'And gives her all unconditionally.' Upon that, with the natural feelings of a mother, I said, 'Good God, I beg your pardon!' fell over the door-step, and came away through the little back-passage where the pantry is."

Mrs. Strong opened the window, and went out into the veranda, where she stood leaning against a pillar.

"But now isn't it, Miss Trotwood, isn't it, David, invigorating," said Mrs. Markleham, mechanically following her with her eyes, "to find a man at Doctor Strong's time of life, with the strength of mind to do this kind of thing? It only shows how right I was. I said to Annie, when Doctor Strong paid a very flattering visit to myself, and made her the subject of a declaration and an offer, I said, 'My dear, there is no doubt whatever, in my opinion, with reference to a suitable provision for you, that Doctor Strong will do more than he binds himself to do.'"

Here the bell rang, and we heard the sound of the visitors' feet as they went out.

"It's all over, no doubt," said the Old Soldier after listening; "the dear creature has signed, sealed, and delivered, and his mind's at rest. Well it may be! What a mind! Annie, my love, I am



going to the study with my paper, for I am a poor creature without news. Miss Trotwood, David, pray come and see the Doctor."

I was conscious of Mr. Dick's standing in the shadow of the room, shutting up his knife, when we accompanied her to the study; and of my aunt's rubbing her nose violently, by the way, as a mild vent for her intolerance of our military friend; but who got first into the study, or how Mrs. Markleham settled herself in a moment in her easy-chair, or how my aunt and I came to be left together near the door (unless her eyes were quicker than mine, and she held me back), I have forgotten, if I ever knew. But this I know, — that we saw the Doctor before he saw us, sitting at his table, among the folio volumes in which he delighted, resting his head calmly on his hand. That, in the same moment, we saw Mrs. Strong glide in, pale and trembling. That Mr. Dick supported her on his arm. That he laid his other hand upon the Doctor's arm, causing him to look up with an abstracted air. That, as the Doctor moved his head, his wife dropped down on one knee at his feet, and, with her hands imploringly lifted, fixed upon his face the memorable look I had never forgotten. That, at this sight, Mrs. Markleham dropped the newspaper, and stared more like a figure-head intended for a ship to be called *The Astonishment* than anything else I can think of.

The gentleness of the Doctor's manner and surprise, the dignity that mingled with the supplicating attitude of his wife, the amiable concern of Mr. Dick, and the earnestness with which my aunt said to herself, "*That man mad!*" (triumphantly expressive of the misery from which she had saved

him), I see and hear, rather than remember, as I write about it.

"Doctor!" said Mr. Dick. "What is it that's amiss? Look here!"

"Annie!" cried the Doctor. "Not at my feet, my dear!"

"Yes!" she said. "I beg and pray that no one will leave the room! Oh, my husband and father, break this long silence! Let us both know what it is that has come between us!"

Mrs. Markleham, by this time recovering the power of speech, and seeming to swell with family pride and motherly indignation, here exclaimed, "Annie, get up immediately, and don't disgrace everybody belonging to you by humbling yourself like that, unless you wish to see me go out of my mind on the spot!"

"Mamma!" returned Annie. "Waste no words on me, for my appeal is to my husband, and even you are nothing here."

"Nothing!" exclaimed Mrs. Markleham. "Me nothing! The child has taken leave of her senses. Please to get me a glass of water!"

I was too attentive to the Doctor and his wife to give any heed to this request; and it made no impression on anybody else; so Mrs. Markleham panted, stared, and fanned herself.

"Annie!" said the Doctor, tenderly taking her in his hands. "My dear! If any unavoidable change has come, in the sequence of time, upon our married life, you are not to blame. The fault is mine, and only mine. There is no change in my affection, admiration, and respect. I wish to make you happy. I truly love and honor you. Rise, Annie, pray!"

But she did not rise. After looking at him for a little while, she sank down closer to him, laid her arm across his knee, and dropping her head upon it, said, —

“If I have any friend here who can speak one word for me, or for my husband in this matter; if I have any friend here who can give a voice to any suspicion that my heart has sometimes whispered to me; if I have any friend here who honors my husband, or has ever cared for me, and has anything within his knowledge, no matter what it is, that may help to mediate between us, I implore that friend to speak !”

There was a profound silence. After a few moments of painful hesitation, I broke the silence.

“Mrs. Strong,” I said, “there is something within my knowledge, which I have been earnestly entreated by Doctor Strong to conceal, and have concealed until to-night. But I believe the time has come when it would be mistaken faith and delicacy to conceal it any longer, and when your appeal absolves me from his injunction.”

She turned her face towards me for a moment, and I knew that I was right. I could not have resisted its entreaty, if the assurance that it gave me had been less convincing.

“Our future peace,” she said, “may be in your hands. I trust it confidently to your not suppressing anything. I know beforehand that nothing you, or any one, can tell me will show my husband’s noble heart in any other light than one. Howsoever it may seem to you to touch me, disregard that. I will speak for myself before him, and before God, afterwards.”

Thus earnestly besought, I made no reference to the Doctor for his permission, but, without any other compromise of the truth than a little softening of the coarseness of Uriah Heep, related plainly what had passed in that same room that night. The staring of Mrs. Markleham during the whole narration, and the shrill, sharp interjections with which she occasionally interrupted it, defy description.

When I had finished, Annie remained, for some few moments, silent, with her head bent down as I have described. Then she took the Doctor's hand (he was sitting in the same attitude as when we had entered the room), and pressed it to her breast, and kissed it. Mr. Dick softly raised her; and she stood, when she began to speak, leaning on him, and looking down upon her husband — from whom she never turned her eyes.

"All that has ever been in my mind since I was married," she said in a low, submissive, tender voice, "I will lay bare before you. I could not live and have one reservation, knowing what I know now."

"Nay, Annie," said the Doctor mildly, "I have never doubted you, my child. There is no need; indeed, there is no need, my dear."

"There is great need," she answered in the same way, "that I should open my whole heart before the soul of generosity and truth, whom, year by year, and day by day, I have loved and venerated more and more, as Heaven knows!"

"Really," interrupted Mrs. Markleham, "if I have any discretion at all —"

("Which you haven't, you Marplot," observed my aunt in an indignant whisper.)

"— I must be permitted to observe that it cannot be requisite to enter into these details."

"No one but my husband can judge of that, mamma," said Annie, without removing her eyes from his face, "and he will hear me. If I say anything to give you pain, mamma, forgive me. I have borne pain first, often and long, myself."

"Upon my word!" gasped Mrs. Markleham.

"When I was very young," said Annie, "quite a little child, my first associations with knowledge of any kind were inseparable from a patient friend and teacher—the friend of my dead father—who was always dear to me. I can remember nothing that I know without remembering him. He stored my mind with its first treasures, and stamped his character upon them all. They never could have been, I think, as good as they have been to me, if I had taken them from any other hands."

"Makes her mother nothing!" exclaimed Mrs. Markleham.

"Not so, mamma," said Annie; "but I make him what he was. I must do that. As I grew up, he occupied the same place still. I was proud of his interest: deeply, fondly, gratefully attached to him. I looked up to him I can hardly describe how—as a father, as a guide, as one whose praise was different from all other praise, as one in whom I could have trusted and confided, if I had doubted all the world. You know, mamma, how young and inexperienced I was when you presented him before me, of a sudden, as a lover."

"I have mentioned the fact, fifty times at least, to everybody here!" said Mrs. Markleham.

("Then hold your tongue, for the Lord's sake,

and don't mention it any more!" muttered my aunt.)

"It was so great a change: so great a loss, I felt it at first," said Annie, still preserving the same look and tone, "that I was agitated and distressed. I was but a girl; and when so great a change came in the character in which I had so long looked up to him, I think I was sorry. But nothing could have made him what he used to be again; and I was proud that he should think me so worthy, and we were married."

"— At St. Alphage, Canterbury," observed Mrs. Markleham.

("Confound the woman!" said my aunt, "she *won't* be quiet!")

"I never thought," proceeded Annie with a heightened color, "of any worldly gain that my husband would bring to me. My young heart had no room in its homage for any such poor reference. Mamma, forgive me when I say that it was *you* who first presented to my mind the thought that any one could wrong me, and wrong him, by such a cruel suspicion."

"Me!" cried Mrs. Markleham.

("Ah! You to be sure!" observed my aunt, "and you can't fan it away, my military friend!")

"It was the first unhappiness of my new life," said Annie. "It was the first occasion of every unhappy moment I have known. Those moments have been more, of late, than I can count: but not — my generous husband! — not for the reason you suppose; for in my heart there is not a thought, a recollection, or a hope, that any power could separate from you."

She raised her eyes, and clasped her hands, and looked as beautiful and true, I thought, as any Spirit. The Doctor looked on her, henceforth, as steadfastly as she on him.

"Mamma is blameless," she went on, "of having ever urged you for herself, and she is blameless in intention every way, I am sure, — but when I saw how many importunate claims that were no claims were pressed upon you in my name; how you were traded on in my name; how generous you were, and how Mr. Wickfield, who had your welfare very much at heart, resented it; the first sense of my exposure to the mean suspicion that my tenderness was bought — and sold to you, of all men on earth — fell upon me, like unmerited disgrace, in which I forced you to participate. I cannot tell you what it was — mamma cannot imagine what it was — to have this trouble always on my mind, yet know in my own soul that on my marriage-day I crowned the love and honor of my life."

"A specimen of the thanks one gets," cried Mrs. Markleham in tears, "for taking care of one's family! I wish I was a Turk!"

("I wish you were with all my heart — and in your native country!" said my aunt.)

"It was at that time that mamma was most solicitous about my cousin Maldon. I had liked him:" she spoke softly, but without any hesitation: "very much. We had been little lovers once. If circumstances had not happened otherwise, I might have come to persuade myself that I really loved him, and might have married him, and been most wretched. There can be no disparity in marriage like unsuitability of mind and purpose."

I pondered on those words, even while I was studiously attending to what followed, as if they had some particular interest, or some strange application that I could not divine. "There can be no disparity in marriage like unsuitability of mind and purpose" — "no disparity in marriage like unsuitability of mind and purpose."

"There is nothing," said Annie, "that we have in common. I have long found that there is nothing. If I were thankful to my husband for no more, instead of for so much, I should be thankful to him for having saved me from the first mistaken impulse of my undisciplined heart."

She stood quite still before the Doctor, and spoke with an earnestness that thrilled me. Yet her voice was just as quiet as before.

"When he was waiting to be the object of your munificence, so freely bestowed for my sake, and when I was unhappy in the mercenary shape I was made to wear, I thought it would have become him better to have worked his own way on. I thought that, if I had been he, I would have tried to do it, at the cost of almost any hardship. But I thought no worse of him until the night of his departure for India. That night I knew he had a false and thankless heart. I saw a double meaning, then, in Mr. Wickfield's scrutiny of me. I perceived, for the first time, the dark suspicion that shadowed my life."

"Suspicion, Annie!" said the Doctor. "No, no, no!"

"In your mind there was none, I know, my husband!" she returned. "And when I came to you, that night, to lay down all my load of shame and grief, and knew that I had to tell that, underneath

your roof, one of my own kindred, to whom you had been a benefactor, for the love of me, had spoken to me words that should have found no utterance, even if I had been the weak and mercenary wretch he thought me — my mind revolted from the taint the very tale conveyed. It died upon my lips, and from that hour till now has never passed them."

Mrs. Markleham, with a short groan, leaned back in her easy-chair; and retired behind her fan, as if she were never coming out any more.

"I have never, but in your presence, interchanged a word with him from that time; then, only when it has been necessary for the avoidance of this explanation. Years have passed since he knew from me what his situation here was. The kindnesses you have secretly done for his advancement, and then disclosed to me, for my surprise and pleasure, have been, you will believe, but aggravations of the unhappiness and burden of my secret."

She sunk down gently at the Doctor's feet, though he did his utmost to prevent her; and said, looking up, tearfully, into his face, —

"Do not speak to me yet! Let me say a little more! Right or wrong, if this were to be done again, I think I should do just the same. You never can know what it was to be devoted to you, with those old associations; to find that any one could be so hard as to suppose that the truth of my heart was bartered away, and to be surrounded by appearances confirming that belief. I was very young, and had no adviser. Between mamma and me, in all relating to you, there was a wide division. If I shrunk into myself, hiding the disrespect I had undergone, it was because I honored you so much, and so much wished that you should honor me!"

"Annie, my pure heart!" said the Doctor, "my dear girl!"

"A little more! a very few words more! I used to think there were so many whom you might have married, who would not have brought such charge and trouble on you, and who would have made your home a worthier home. I used to be afraid that I had better have remained your pupil, and almost your child. I used to fear that I was so unsuited to your learning and wisdom. If all this made me shrink within myself (as indeed it did), when I had that to tell, it was still because I honored you so much, and hoped that you might one day honor me."

"That day has shone this long time, Annie," said the Doctor, "and can have but one long night, my dear."

"Another word! I afterwards meant—steadfastly meant, and purposed to myself—to bear the whole weight of knowing the unworthiness of one to whom you had been so good. And now a last word, dearest and best of friends! The cause of the late change in you, which I have seen with so much pain and sorrow, and have sometimes referred to my old apprehension—at other times to lingering suppositions nearer to the truth—has been made clear to-night; and by an accident I have also come to know, to-night, the full measure of your noble trust in me, even under that mistake. I do not hope that any love and duty I may render in return will ever make me worthy of your priceless confidence; but, with all this knowledge fresh upon me, I can lift my eyes to this dear face, revered as a father's, loved as a husband's, sacred to me in my

childhood as a friend's, and solemnly declare that in my lightest thought I have never wronged you; never wavered in the love and the fidelity I owe you!"

She had her arms around the Doctor's neck, and he leant his head down over her, mingling his gray hair with her dark brown tresses.

"Oh, hold me to your heart, my husband! Never cast me out! Do not think or speak of disparity between us, for there is none, except in all my many imperfections. Every succeeding year I have known this better, as I have esteemed you more and more. Oh, take me to your heart, my husband, for my love was founded on a rock, and it endures!"

In the silence that ensued, my aunt walked gravely up to Mr. Dick, without at all hurrying herself, and gave him a hug and a sounding kiss. And it was very fortunate, with a view to his credit, that she did so; for I am confident that I detected him, at that moment, in the act of making preparations to stand on one leg, as an appropriate expression of delight.

"You are a very remarkable man, Dick!" said my aunt, with an air of unqualified approbation; "and never pretend to be anything else, for I know better!"

With that, my aunt pulled him by the sleeve, and nodded to me: and we three stole quietly out of the room, and came away.

"That's a settler for our military friend, at any rate," said my aunt on the way home. "I should sleep the better for that, if there was nothing else to be glad of!"

"She was quite overcome, I am afraid," said Mr. Dick with great commiseration.

"What! Did you ever see a crocodile overcome?" inquired my aunt.

"I don't think I ever saw a crocodile," returned Mr. Dick mildly.

"There never would have been anything the matter, if it hadn't been for that old Animal," said my aunt with strong emphasis. "It's very much to be wished that some mothers would leave their daughters alone after marriage, and not be so violently affectionate. They seem to think the only return that can be made them for bringing an unfortunate young woman into the world—God bless my soul, as if she asked to be brought, or wanted to come!—is full liberty to worry her out of it again. What are you thinking of, Trot?"

I was thinking of all that had been said. My mind was still running on some of the expressions used. "There can be no disparity in marriage like unsuitability of mind and purpose." "The first mistaken impulse of an undisciplined heart." "My love was founded on a rock." But we were at home; and the trodden leaves were lying under foot, and the autumn wind was blowing.

CHAPTER VII.

INTELLIGENCE.

I MUST have been married, if I may trust to my imperfect memory for dates, about a year or so, when one evening, as I was returning from a solitary walk, thinking of the book I was then writing—for my success had steadily increased with my steady application, and I was engaged at that time upon my first work of fiction—I came past Mrs. Steerforth's house. I had often passed it before, during my residence in that neighborhood, though never when I could choose another road. Howbeit, it did sometimes happen that it was not easy to find another, without making a long circuit; and so I had passed that way, upon the whole, pretty often.

I had never done more than glance at the house as I went by with a quickened step. It had been uniformly gloomy and dull. None of the best rooms abutted on the road; and the narrow, heavily framed, old-fashioned windows, never cheerful under any circumstances, looked very dismal, close shut, and with their blinds always drawn down. There was a covered way, across a little paved court, to an entrance that was never used; and there was one round staircase window, at odds with all the rest,

and the only one unshaded by a blind, which had the same unoccupied blank look. I do not remember that I ever saw a light in all the house. If I had been a casual passer-by, I should have probably supposed that some childless person lay dead in it. If I had happily possessed no knowledge of the place, and had seen it often in that changeless state, I should have pleased my fancy with many ingenious speculations, I dare say.

As it was, I thought as little of it as I might. But my mind could not go by it and leave it, as my body did; and it usually awakened a long train of meditations. Coming before me on this particular evening that I mention, mingled with the childish recollections and later fancies, the ghosts of half-formed hopes, the broken shadows of disappointments dimly seen and understood, the blending of experience and imagination, incidental to the occupation with which my thoughts had been busy, it was more than commonly suggestive. I fell into a brown study as I walked on, and a voice at my side made me start.

It was a woman's voice, too. I was not long in recollecting Mrs. Steerforth's little parlor-maid, who had formerly worn blue ribbons in her cap. She had taken them out now, to adapt herself, I suppose, to the altered character of the house; and wore but one or two disconsolate bows of sober brown.

"If you please, sir, would you have the goodness to walk in, and speak to Miss Dartle?"

"Has Miss Dartle sent you for me?" I inquired.

"Not to-night, sir, but it's just the same. Miss Dartle saw you pass a night or two ago; and I was

to sit at work on the staircase, and, when I saw you pass again, to ask you to step in and speak to her."

I turned back, and inquired of my conductor, as we went along, how Mrs. Steerforth was. She said her lady was but poorly, and kept her own room a good deal.

When we arrived at the house, I was directed to Miss Dartle in the garden, and left to make my presence known to her myself. She was sitting on a seat at one end of a kind of terrace, overlooking the great city. It was a sombre evening, with a lurid light in the sky; and as I saw the prospect scowling in the distance, with here and there some larger object starting up into the sullen glare, I fancied it was no inapt companion to the memory of this fierce woman.

She saw me as I advanced, and rose for a moment to receive me. I thought her, then, still more colorless and thin than when I had seen her last; the flashing eyes still brighter, and the scar still plainer.

Our meeting was not cordial. We had parted angrily on the last occasion; and there was an air of disdain about her, which she took no pains to conceal.

"I am told you wish to speak to me, Miss Dartle," said I, standing near her, with my hand upon the back of the seat, and declining her gesture of invitation to sit down.

"If you please," said she. "Pray has this girl been found?"

"No."

"And yet she has run away!"

I saw her thin lips working while she looked at me, as if they were eager to load her with reproaches.

"Run away?" I repeated.

"Yes! From him," she said with a laugh. "If she is not found, perhaps she never will be found. She may be dead!"

The vaunting cruelty with which she met my glance I never saw expressed in any other face that ever I have seen.

"To wish her dead," said I, "may be the kindest wish that one of her own sex could bestow upon her. I am glad that time has softened you so much, Miss Dartle."

She condescended to make no reply, but, turning on me with another scornful laugh, said, —

"The friends of this excellent and much-injured young lady are friends of yours. You are their champion, and assert their rights. Do you wish to know what is known of her?"

"Yes," said I.

She rose with an ill-favored smile, and taking a few steps towards a wall of holly that was near at hand, dividing the lawn from a kitchen garden, said, in a louder voice, "Come here!" — as if she were calling to some unclean beast.

"You will restrain any demonstrative championship or vengeance in this place, of course, Mr. Copperfield?" said she, looking over her shoulder at me with the same expression.

I inclined my head, without knowing what she meant; and she said, "Come here!" again; and returned, followed by the respectable Mr. Littimer, who, with undiminished respectability, made me a bow, and took up his position behind her. The air of wicked grace: of triumph, in which, strange to say, there was yet something feminine and alluring:

with which she reclined upon the seat between us, and looked at me, was worthy of a cruel Princess in a Legend.

"Now," said she imperiously, without glancing at him, and touching the old wound as it throbbed: perhaps, in this instance, with pleasure rather than pain, "tell Mr. Copperfield about the flight."

"Mr. James and myself, ma'am —"

"Don't address yourself to me!" she interrupted with a frown.

"Mr. James and myself, sir —"

"Nor to me, if you please," said I.

Mr. Littimer, without being at all discomposed, signified, by a slight obeisance, that anything that was most agreeable to us was most agreeable to him; and began again, —

"Mr. James and myself have been abroad with the young woman, ever since she left Yarmouth under Mr. James's protection. We have been in a variety of places, and seen a deal of foreign country. We have been in France, Switzerland, Italy, in fact, almost all parts."

He looked at the back of the seat, as if he were addressing himself to that; and softly played upon it with his hands, as if he were striking chords upon a dumb piano.

"Mr. James took quite uncommonly to the young woman; and was more settled, for a length of time, than I have known him to be since I have been in his service. The young woman was very improvable, and spoke the languages; and wouldn't have been known for the same country person. I noticed that she was much admired wherever we went."

Miss Dartle put her hand upon her side. I saw

him steal a glance at her, and slightly smile to himself.

“Very much admired, indeed, the young woman was. What with her dress; what with the air and sun; what with being made so much of; what with this, that, and the other; her merits really attracted general notice.”

He made a short pause. Her eyes wandered restlessly over the distant prospect, and she bit her nether lip to stop that busy mouth

Taking his hands from the seat, and placing one of them within the other, as he settled himself on one leg, Mr. Littimer proceeded, with his eyes cast down, and his respectable head a little advanced, and a little on one side, —

“The young woman went on in this manner for some time, being occasionally low in her spirits, until I think she began to weary Mr. James by giving way to her low spirits and tempers of that kind; and things were not so comfortable. Mr. James he began to be restless again. The more restless he got, the worse she got; and I must say, for myself, that I had a very difficult time of it indeed between the two. Still matters were patched up here, and made good there, over and over again; and altogether lasted, I am sure, for a longer time than anybody could have expected.”

Recalling her eyes from the distance, she looked at me again, now, with her former air. Mr. Littimer, clearing his throat behind his hand with a respectable short cough, changed legs, and went on, —

“At last, when there had been, upon the whole, a good many words and reproaches, Mr. James he set

off one morning from the neighborhood of Naples, where we had a villa (the young woman being very partial to the sea), and, under pretence of coming back in a day or so, left it in charge with me to break it out that, for the general happiness of all concerned, he was" — here an interruption of the short cough — "gone. But Mr. James, I must say, certainly did behave extremely honorable; for he proposed that the young woman should marry a very respectable person, who was fully prepared to overlook the past, and who was, at least, as good as anybody the young woman could have aspired to in a regular way: her connections being very common."

He changed legs again, and wetted his lips. I was convinced that the scoundrel spoke of himself, and I saw my conviction reflected in Miss Dartle's face.

"This I also had it in charge to communicate. I was willing to do anything to relieve Mr. James from his difficulty, and to restore harmony between himself and an affectionate parent, who has undergone so much on his account. Therefore I undertook the commission. The young woman's violence when she came to, after I broke the fact of his departure, was beyond all expectations. She was quite mad, and had to be held by force; or, if she couldn't have got to a knife, or got to the sea, she'd have beaten her head against the marble floor."

Miss Dartle, leaning back upon the seat, with a light of exultation in her face, seemed almost to caress the sounds this fellow had uttered.

"But when I came to the second part of what had been intrusted to me," said Mr. Littimer, rubbing his hands uneasily, "which anybody might

have supposed would have been, at all events, appreciated as a kind intention, then the young woman came out in her true colors. A more outrageous person I never did see. Her conduct was surprisingly bad. She had no more gratitude, no more feeling, no more patience, no more reason in her, than a stock or a stone. If I hadn't been upon my guard, I am convinced she would have had my blood."

"I think the better of her for it," said I indignantly.

Mr. Littimer bent his head, as much as to say, "Indeed, sir? But you're young!" and resumed his narrative.

"It was necessary, in short, for a time, to take away everything nigh her, that she could do herself, or anybody else, an injury with, and to shut her up close. Notwithstanding which, she got out in the night; forced the lattice of a window, that I had nailed up myself; dropped on a vine that was trailed below; and never has been seen or heard of, to my knowledge, since."

"She is dead, perhaps," said Miss Dartle with a smile, as if she could have spurned the body of the ruined girl.

"She may have drowned herself, miss," returned Mr. Littimer, catching at an excuse for addressing himself to somebody. "It's very possible. Or, she may have had assistance from the boatmen, and the boatmen's wives and children. Being given to low company, she was very much in the habit of talking to them on the beach, Miss Dartle, and sitting by their boats. I have known her to do it, when Mr. James has been away, whole days. Mr. James was

far from pleased to find out, once, that she had told the children she was a boatman's daughter, and that in her own country, long ago, she had roamed about the beach like them."

Oh, Emily! Unhappy beauty! What a picture rose before me of her sitting on the far-off shore, among the children like herself when she was innocent, listening to little voices such as might have called her Mother had she been a poor man's wife; and to the great voice of the sea, with its eternal "Never more!"

"When it was clear that nothing could be done, Miss Dartle —"

"Did I tell you not to speak to me?" she said with stern contempt.

"You spoke to me, miss," he replied. "I beg your pardon. But it's my service to obey."

"Do your service," she returned. "Finish your story and go!"

"When it was clear," he said with infinite respectability, and an obedient bow, "that she was not to be found, I went to Mr. James, at the place where it had been agreed that I should write to him, and informed him of what had occurred. Words passed between us in consequence, and I felt it due to my character to leave him. I could bear, and I have borne, a great deal from Mr. James; but he insulted me too far. He hurt me. Knowing the unfortunate difference between himself and his mother, and what her anxiety of mind was likely to be, I took the liberty of coming home to England, and relating —"

"For money which I paid him," said Miss Dartle to me.

"Just so, ma'am. — And relating what I knew. I am not aware," said Mr. Littimer after a moment's reflection, "that there is anything else. I am at present out of employment, and should be happy to meet with a respectable situation."

Miss Dartle glanced at me, as though she would inquire if there were anything that I desired to ask. As there was something which had occurred to my mind, I said in reply, —

"I could wish to know from this — creature," I could not bring myself to utter any more conciliatory word, "whether they intercepted a letter that was written to her from home, or whether he supposes that she received it."

He remained calm and silent, with his eyes fixed on the ground, and the tip of every finger of his right hand delicately poised against the tip of every finger of his left.

Miss Dartle turned her head disdainfully towards him.

"I beg your pardon, miss," he said, awakening from his abstraction, "but, however submissive to you, I have my position, though a servant. Mr. Copperfield and you, miss, are different people. If Mr. Copperfield wishes to know anything from me, I take the liberty of reminding Mr. Copperfield that he can put a question to me. I have a character to maintain."

After a momentary struggle with myself, I turned my eyes upon him, and said, "You have heard my question. Consider it addressed to yourself, if you choose. What answer do you make?"

"Sir," he rejoined, with an occasional separation and re-union of those delicate tips, "my answer

must be qualified ; because, to betray Mr. James's confidence to his mother, and to betray it to you, are two different actions. It is not probable, I consider, that Mr. James would encourage the receipt of letters likely to increase low spirits and unpleasantness : but further than that, sir, I should wish to avoid going."

"Is that all?" inquired Miss Dartle of me.

I indicated that I had nothing more to say. "Except," I added as I saw him moving off, "that I understand this fellow's part in the wicked story, and that, as I shall make it known to the honest man who has been her father from her childhood, I would recommend him to avoid going too much into public."

He had stopped the moment I began, and had listened with his usual repose of manner.

"Thank you, sir. But you'll excuse me if I say, sir, that there are neither slaves nor slave-drivers in this country, and that people are not allowed to take the law into their own hands. If they do, it is more to their own peril, I believe, than to other people's. Consequently speaking, I am not at all afraid of going wherever I may wish, sir."

With that, he made a polite bow ; and, with another to Miss Dartle, went away through the arch in the wall of holly by which he had come. Miss Dartle and I regarded each other for a little while in silence ; her manner being exactly what it was when she had produced the man.

"He says, besides," she observed with a slow curling of her lip, "that his master, as he hears, is coasting Spain ; and, this done, is away to gratify his seafaring tastes till he is weary. But that is of

no interest to you. Between these two proud persons, mother and son, there is a wider breach than before, and little hope of its healing, for they are one at heart, and time makes each more obstinate and imperious. Neither is this of any interest to you; but it introduces what I wish to say. This devil whom you make an angel of, I mean this low girl whom he picked out of the tide-mud," with her black eyes full upon me, and her passionate finger up, "may be alive, — for I believe some common things are hard to die. If she is, you will desire to have a pearl of such price found and taken care of. We desire that, too; that he may not by any chance be made her prey again. So far, we are united in one interest; and that is why I, who would do her any mischief that so coarse a wretch is capable of feeling, have sent for you to hear what you have heard."

I saw, by the change in her face, that some one was advancing behind me. It was Mrs. Steerforth, who gave me her hand more coldly than of yore, and with an augmentation of her former stateliness of manner; but still, I perceived — and I was touched by it — with an ineffaceable remembrance of my old love for her son. She was greatly altered. Her fine figure was far less upright, her handsome face was deeply marked, and her hair was almost white. But, when she sat down on the seat, she was a handsome lady still; and well I knew the bright eye, with its lofty look, that had been a light in my very dreams at school.

"Is Mr. Copperfield informed of everything, Rosa?"

"Yes."

"And has he heard Littimer himself?"

"Yes; I have told him why you wished it."

"You are a good girl. I have had some slight correspondence with your former friend, sir," addressing me, "but it has not restored his sense of duty or natural obligation. Therefore I have no other object in this than what Rosa has mentioned. If, by the course which may relieve the mind of the decent man you brought here (for whom I am sorry — I can say no more), my son may be saved from again falling into the snares of a designing enemy, well!"

She drew herself up, and sat looking straight before her, far away.

"Madam," I said respectfully, "I understand. I assure you I am in no danger of putting any strained construction on your motives. But I must say, even to you, having known this injured family from childhood, that if you suppose the girl, so deeply wronged, has not been cruelly deluded, and would not rather die a hundred deaths than take a cup of water from your son's hand now, you cherish a terrible mistake."

"Well, Rosa, well!" said Mrs. Steerforth, as the other was about to interpose, "it is no matter. Let it be. You are married, sir, I am told?"

I answered that I had been some time married.

"And are doing well? I hear little in the quiet life I lead, but I understand you are beginning to be famous."

"I have been very fortunate," I said, "and find my name connected with some praise."

"You have no mother?" — in a softened voice.

"No."

"It is a pity," she returned. "She would have been proud of you. Good-night!"

I took the hand she held out with a dignified, unbending air, and it was as calm in mine as if her breast had been in peace. Her pride could still its very pulses it appeared, and draw the placid veil before her face, through which she sat looking straight before her on the far distance.

As I moved away from them along the terrace, I could not help observing how steadily they both sat gazing on the prospect, and how it thickened and closed around them. Here and there, some early lamps were seen to twinkle in the distant city; and in the eastern quarter of the sky the lurid light still hovered. But, from the greater part of the broad valley interposed, a mist was rising like a sea, which, mingling with the darkness, made it seem as if the gathering waters would encompass them. I have reason to remember this, and think of it with awe; for, before I looked upon those two again, a stormy sea had risen to their feet.

Reflecting on what had been thus told me, I felt it right that it should be communicated to Mr. Peggotty. On the following evening I went into London in quest of him. He was always wandering about from place to place, with his one object of recovering his niece before him; but was more in London than elsewhere. Often and often, now, had I seen him in the dead of night passing along the streets, searching, among the few who loitered out of doors at those untimely hours, for what he dreaded to find.

He kept a lodging over the little chandler's shop in Hungerford Market, which I have had occasion

to mention more than once, and from which he first went forth upon his errand of mercy. Hither I directed my walk. On making inquiry for him, I learned from the people of the house that he had not gone out yet, and I should find him in his room upstairs.

He was sitting reading by a window in which he kept a few plants. The room was very neat and orderly. I saw in a moment that it was always kept prepared for her reception, and that he never went out but he thought it possible he might bring her home. He had not heard my tap at the door, and only raised his eyes when I laid my hand upon his shoulder.

"Mas'r Davy ! Thankee, sir ! thankee hearty, for this visit ! Sit ye down. You're kindly welcome, sir."

"Mr. Peggotty," said I, taking the chair he handed me, "don't expect much ! I have heard some news."

"Of Em'ly ?"

He put his hand, in a nervous manner, on his mouth, and turned pale, as he fixed his eyes on mine.

"It gives no clew to where she is ; but she is not with him."

He sat down, looking intently at me, and listened in profound silence to all I had to tell. I well remember the sense of dignity, beauty even, with which the patient gravity of his face impressed me, when, having gradually removed his eyes from mine, he sat looking downward, leaning his forehead on his hand. He offered no interruption, but remained throughout perfectly still. He seemed to pursue

her figure through the narrative, and to let every other shape go by him as if it were nothing.

When I had done, he shaded his face, and continued silent. I looked out of the window for a little while, and occupied myself with the plants.

"How do you fare to feel about it, Mas'r Davy?" he inquired at length.

"I think that she is living," I replied.

"I doesn't know. Maybe the first shock was too rough, and in the wildness of her art—! That there blue water as she used to speak on. Could she have thowt o' that so many year, because it was to be her grave?"

He said this, musing, in a low, frightened voice; and walked across the little room.

"And yet," he added, "Mas'r Davy, I have felt so sure as she was living—I have knowed, awake and sleeping, as it was so trew that I should find her—I have been so led on by it, and held up by it—that I doesn't believe I can have been deceived. No, Em'ly's alive!"

He put his hand firmly on the table, and set his sunburnt face into a resolute expression.

"My niece, Em'ly, is alive, sir!" he said steadfastly. "I doesn't know wheer it comes from, or how 'tis, but *I am told* as she's alive!"

He looked almost like a man inspired as he said it. I waited for a few moments, until he could give me his undivided attention; and then proceeded to explain the precaution that, it had occurred to me last night, it would be wise to take.

"Now, my dear friend—" I began.

"Thankee, thankee, kind sir," he said, grasping my hand in both of his.

"If she should make her way to London, which is likely — for where could she lose herself so readily as in this vast city; and what would she wish to do, but lose and hide herself, if she does not go home? —"

"And she won't go home," he interposed, shaking his head mournfully. "If she had left of her own accord, she might; not as 'twas, sir."

"If she should come here," said I, "I believe there is one person here more likely to discover her than any other in the world. Do you remember — hear what I say with fortitude — think of your great object! — do you remember Martha?"

"Of our town?"

I needed no other answer than his face.

"Do you know that she is in London?"

"I have seen her in the streets," he answered with a shiver.

"But you don't know," said I, "that Emily was charitable to her, with Ham's help, long before she fled from home. Nor, that when we met one night, and spoke together in the room yonder, over the way, she listened at the door."

"Mas'r Davy!" he replied in astonishment. "That night when it snowed so hard?"

"That night. I have never seen her since. I went back, after parting from you, to speak to her, but she was gone. I was unwilling to mention her to you then, and I am now; but she is the person of whom I speak, and with whom I think we should communicate. Do you understand?"

"Too well, sir," he replied. We had sunk our voices almost to a whisper, and continued to speak in that tone.

"You say you have seen her. Do you think that you could find her? I could only hope to do so by chance."

"I think, Mas'r Davy, I know wheer to look."

"It is dark. Being together, shall we go out now, and try to find her to-night?"

He assented, and prepared to accompany me. Without appearing to observe what he was doing, I saw how carefully he adjusted the little room, put a candle ready and the means of lighting it, arranged the bed, and finally took out of a drawer one of her dresses (I remember to have seen her wear it), neatly folded with some other garments, and a bonnet, which he placed upon a chair. He made no allusion to these clothes, neither did I. There they had been waiting for her many and many a night, no doubt.

"The time was, Mas'r Davy," he said as we came downstairs, "when I thowt this girl, Martha, a'most like the dirt underneath my Em'ly's feet. God forgive me, there's a difference now!"

As we went along, partly to hold him in conversation, and partly to satisfy myself, I asked him about Ham. He said, almost in the same words as formerly, that Ham was just the same, "wearing away his life with keinder no care nohow for't; but never murmuring; and liked by all."

I asked him what he thought Ham's state of mind was, in reference to the cause of their misfortunes? Whether he believed it was dangerous? What he supposed, for example, Ham would do, if he and Steerforth ever should encounter?

"I doesn't know, sir," he replied. "I have thowt of it oftentimes, but I can't arrize myself of it, no matters."

I recalled to his remembrance the morning after her departure, when we were all three on the beach. "Do you recollect," said I, "a certain wild way in which he looked out to sea, and spoke about 'the end of it'?"

"Sure I do!" said he.

"What do you suppose he meant?"

"Mas'r Davy," he replied, "I've put the question to myself a mort o' times, and never found no answer. And theer's one curious thing — that, though he is so pleasant, I wouldn't fare to feel comfortable to try and get his mind upon't. He never said a wured to me as warn't as dootiful as dootiful could be, and it ain't likely as he'd begin to speak any other ways now; but it's fur from being fleet water in his mind, where them thowts lays. It's deep, sir, and I can't see down."

"You are right," said I, "and that has sometimes made me anxious."

"And me too, Mas'r Davy," he rejoined. "Even more so, I do assure you, than his ventersome ways, though both belongs to the alteration in him. I doesn't know as he'd do violence under any circumstances, but I hope as them two may be kep' asunders."

We had come, through Temple Bar, into the City. Conversing no more now, and walking at my side, he yielded himself up to the one aim of his devoted life, and went on with that hushed concentration of his faculties which would have made his figure solitary in a multitude. We were not far from Blackfriars Bridge, when he turned his head, and pointed to a solitary female figure flitting along the opposite side of the street. I knew it, readily, to be the figure that we sought.

We crossed the road, and were pressing on towards her, when it occurred to me that she might be more disposed to feel a woman's interest in the lost girl, if we spoke to her in a quieter place, aloof from the crowd, and where we should be less observed. I advised my companion, therefore, that we should not address her yet, but follow her; consulting in this, likewise, an indistinct desire I had to know where she went.

He acquiescing, we followed at a distance: never losing sight of her, but never caring to come very near, as she frequently looked about. Once, she stopped to listen to a band of music, and then we stopped too.

She went on a long way. Still we went on. It was evident, from the manner in which she held her course, that she was going to some fixed destination; and this, and her keeping in the busy streets, and, I suppose, the strange fascination in the secrecy and mystery of so following any one, made me adhere to my first purpose. At length she turned into a dull, dark street, where the noise and crowd were lost; and I said, "We may speak to her now;" and, mending our pace, we went after her.

CHAPTER VIII.

MARTHA.

WE were now down in Westminster. We had turned back to follow her, having encountered her coming towards us; and Westminster Abbey was the point at which she passed from the lights and noise of the leading streets. She proceeded so quickly, when she got free of the two currents of passengers setting towards and from the bridge, that, between this and the advance she had of us when she struck off, we were in the narrow water-side street by Millbank before we came up with her. At that moment she crossed the road, as if to avoid the footsteps that she heard so close behind: and, without looking back, passed on even more rapidly.

A glimpse of the river through a dull gateway, where some wagons were housed for the night, seemed to arrest my feet. I touched my companion without speaking, and we both forbore to cross after her, and both followed on that opposite side of the way; keeping as quietly as we could in the shadow of the houses, but keeping very near her.

There was, and is when I write, at the end of that low-lying street, a dilapidated little wooden build-

ing, probably an obsolete old ferry-house. Its position is just at that point where the street ceases, and the road begins to lie between a row of houses and the river. As soon as she came here, and saw the water, she stopped as if she had come to her destination; and presently went slowly along by the brink of the river, looking intently at it.

All the way here, I had supposed that she was going to some house; indeed, I had vaguely entertained the hope that the house might be in some way associated with the lost girl. But, that one dark glimpse of the river, through the gateway, had instinctively prepared me for her going no farther.

The neighborhood was a dreary one at that time; as oppressive, sad, and solitary by night as any about London. There were neither wharves nor houses on the melancholy waste of road near the great blank Prison. A sluggish ditch deposited its mud at the prison walls. Coarse grass and rank weeds straggled over all the marshy land in the vicinity. In one part, carcasses of houses, inauspiciously begun and never finished, rotted away. In another, the ground was cumbered with rusty iron monsters of steam-boilers, wheels, cranks, pipes, furnaces, paddles, anchors, diving-bells, windmill-sails, and I know not what strange objects, accumulated by some speculator, and grovelling in the dust, underneath which — having sunk into the soil of their own weight in wet weather — they had the appearance of vainly trying to hide themselves. The clash and glare of sundry fiery Works upon the river-side arose by night to disturb everything, except the heavy and unbroken smoke that poured out of their chimneys. Slimy gaps and causeways,



winding among old wooden piles, with a sickly substance clinging to the latter, like green hair, and the rags of last year's handbills offering rewards for drowned men fluttering above high-water mark, led down through the ooze and slush to the ebb tide. There was a story that one of the pits dug for the dead in the time of the Great Plague was hereabout: and a blighting influence seemed to have proceeded from it over the whole place. Or else it looked as if it had gradually decomposed into that nightmare condition, out of the overflowings of the polluted stream.

As if she were a part of the refuse it had cast out, and left to corruption and decay, the girl we had followed strayed down to the river's brink, and stood in the midst of this night-picture, lonely and still, looking at the water.

There were some boats and barges astrand in the mud, and these enabled us to come within a few yards of her without being seen. I then signed to Mr. Peggotty to remain where he was, and emerged from their shade to speak to her. I did not approach her solitary figure without trembling; for this gloomy end to her determined walk, and the way in which she stood, almost within the cavernous shadow of the iron bridge, looking at the lights crookedly reflected in the strong tide, inspired a dread within me.

I think she was talking to herself. I am sure, although absorbed in gazing at the water, that her shawl was off her shoulders, and that she was muffling her hands in it, in an unsettled and bewildered way, more like the action of a sleep-walker than a waking person. I know, and never can forget, that

there was that in her wild manner which gave me no assurance but that she would sink before my eyes, until I had her arm within my grasp.

At the same moment I said "Martha!"

She uttered a terrified scream, and struggled with me with such strength that I doubt if I could have held her alone. But a stronger hand than mine was laid upon her; and when she raised her frightened eyes, and saw whose it was, she made but one more effort, and dropped down between us. We carried her away from the water to where there were some dry stones, and there laid her down, crying and moaning. In a little while she sat among the stones, holding her wretched head with both her hands.

"Oh, the river!" she cried passionately. "Oh, the river!"

"Hush, hush!" said I. "Calm yourself."

But she still repeated the same words, continually exclaiming, "Oh, the river!" over and over again.

"I know it's like me!" she exclaimed. "I know that I belong to it. I know that it's the natural company of such as I am! It comes from country places, where there was once no harm in it — and it creeps through the dismal streets, defiled and miserable — and it goes away, like my life, to a great sea that is always troubled — and I feel that I must go with it!"

I have never known what despair was, except in the tone of those words.

"I can't keep away from it. I can't forget it. It haunts me day and night. It's the only thing in all the world that I am fit for, or that's fit for me. Oh, the dreadful river!"

The thought passed through my mind that in the face of my companion, as he looked upon her without speech or motion, I might have read his niece's history, if I had known nothing of it. I never saw, in any painting or reality, horror and compassion so impressively blended. He shook as if he would have fallen; and his hand — I touched it with my own, for his appearance alarmed me — was deadly cold.

"She is in a state of frenzy," I whispered to him. "She will speak differently in a little time."

I don't know what he would have said in answer. He made some motion with his mouth, and seemed to think he had spoken: but he had only pointed to her with his outstretched hand.

A new burst of crying came upon her now, in which she once more hid her face among the stones, and lay before us, a prostrate image of humiliation and ruin. Knowing that this state must pass before we could speak to her with any hope, I ventured to restrain him when he would have raised her, and we stood by in silence until she became more tranquil.

"Martha!" said I then, leaning down, and helping her to rise — she seemed to want to rise, as if with the intention of going away, but she was weak, and leaned against a boat. "Do you know who this is who is with me?"

She said faintly, "Yes."

"Do you know that we have followed you a long way to-night?"

She shook her head. She looked neither at him nor at me, but stood in a humbled attitude, holding her bonnet and shawl in one hand, without appear-

ing conscious of them, and pressing the other, clenched, against her forehead.

"Are you composed enough," said I, "to speak on the subject which so interested you, I hope Heaven may remember it! — that snowy night?"

Her sobs broke out afresh, and she murmured some inarticulate thanks to me for not having driven her away from the door.

"I want to say nothing for myself," she said after a few moments. "I am bad, I am lost. I have no hope at all. But tell him, sir," — she had shrunk away from him, — "if you don't feel too hard to me to do it, that I never was in any way the cause of his misfortune."

"It has never been attributed to you," I returned, earnestly, responding to her earnestness.

"It was you, if I don't deceive myself," she said in a broken voice, "that came into the kitchen the night she took such pity on me; was so gentle to me; didn't shrink away from me like all the rest, and gave me such kind help! Was it you, sir?"

"It was," said I.

"I should have been in the river long ago," she said, glancing at it with a terrible expression, "if any wrong to her had been upon my mind. I never could have kept out of it a single winter's night, if I had not been free of any share in that!"

"The cause of her flight is too well understood," I said. "You are innocent of any part in it, we thoroughly believe, — we know."

"Oh, I might have been much better for her, if I had had a better heart!" exclaimed the girl, with most forlorn regret; "for she was always good to me! She never spoke a word to me but what was

pleasant and right. Is it likely I would try to make her what I am myself, knowing what I am myself so well? When I lost everything that makes life dear, the worst of all my thoughts was that I was parted forever from her!"

Mr. Peggotty, standing with one hand on the gunwale of the boat, and his eyes cast down, put his disengaged hand before his face.

"And when I heard what had happened before that snowy night, from some belonging to our town," cried Martha, "the bitterest thought in all my mind was, that the people would remember she once kept company with me, and would say I had corrupted her! When, Heaven knows, I would have died to have brought back her good name!"

Long unused to any self-control, the piercing agony of her remorse and grief was terrible.

"To have died would not have been much — what can I say? — I would have lived!" she cried. "I would have lived to be old in the wretched streets — and to wander about, avoided, in the dark — and to see the day break on the ghastly line of houses, and remember how the same sun used to shine into my room, and wake me once — I would have done even that to save her!"

Sinking on the stones, she took some in each hand, and clenched them up, as if she would have ground them. She writhed into some new posture constantly: stiffening her arms, twisting them before her face, as though to shut out from her eyes the little light there was, and drooping her head, as if it were heavy with insupportable recollections.

"What shall I ever do?" she said, fighting thus with her despair. "How can I go on as I am, a

solitary curse to myself, a living disgrace to every one I come near?" Suddenly she turned to my companion. "Stamp upon me, kill me! When she was your pride, you would have thought I had done her harm if I had brushed against her in the street. You can't believe — why should you? — a syllable that comes out of my lips. It would be a burning shame upon you, even now, if she and I exchanged a word. I don't complain. I don't say she and I are alike — I know there is a long, long way between us. I only say, with all my guilt and wretchedness upon my head, that I am grateful to her from my soul, and love her. Oh, don't think that all the power I had of loving anything is quite worn out! Throw me away, as all the world does. Kill me for being what I am, and having ever known her; but don't think that of me!"

He looked upon her, while she made this supplication, in a wild, distracted manner; and, when she was silent, gently raised her.

"Martha," said Mr. Peggotty, "God forbid as I should judge you. Forbid as I, of all men, should do that, my girl! You doesn't know half the change that's come, in course of time, upon me, when you think it likely. Well!" he paused a moment, then went on. "You doesn't understand how 'tis that this here gentleman and me has wished to speak to you. You doesn't understand what 'tis we has afore us. Listen, now!"

His influence upon her was complete. She stood, shrinkingly, before him, as if she were afraid to meet his eyes; but her passionate sorrow was quite hushed and mute.

"If you heerd," said Mr. Peggotty, "owt of what

passed between Mas'r Davy and me, th' night when it sned so hard, you know as I have been — wheer not — fur to seek my dear niece. My dear niece," he repeated steadily. "Fur she's more dear to me now, Martha, than ever she was dear afore."

She put her hands before her face; but otherwise remained quiet.

"I have heerd her tell," said Mr. Peggotty, "as you was early left fatherless and motherless, with no friend fur to take, in a rough seafaring way, their place. Maybe you can guess that, if you'd had such a friend, you'd have got into a way of being fond of him in course of time, and that my niece was keinder daughter-like to me."

As she was silently trembling, he put her shawl carefully about her, taking it up from the ground for that purpose.

"Whereby," said he, "I know, both as she would go to the wureld's furdest end with me, if she could once see me again; and that she would fly to the wureld's furdest end to keep off seeing me. For though she ain't no call to doubt my love, and doesn't — and doesn't," he repeated, with a quiet assurance of the truth of what he said, "there's shame steps in, and keeps betwixt us."

I read, in every word of his plain, impressive way of delivering himself, new evidence of his having thought of this one topic in every feature it presented.

"According to our reckoning," he proceeded, "Mas'r Davy's here, and mine, she is like, one day, to make her own poor solitary course to London. We believe — Mas'r Davy, me, and all of us — that you are as innocent of everything that has befall

her as the unborn child. You've spoken of her being pleasant, kind, and gentle to you. Bless her, I knew she was! I knew she always was to all. You're thankful to her, and you love her. Help us all you can to find her, and may Heaven reward you!"

She looked at him hastily, and for the first time, as if she were doubtful of what he had said.

"Will you trust me?" she asked in a low voice of astonishment.

"Full and free!" said Mr. Peggotty.

"To speak to her, if I should ever find her; shelter her, if I have any shelter to divide with her; and then, without her knowledge, come to you, and bring you to her?" she asked hurriedly.

We both replied together, "Yes!"

She lifted up her eyes, and solemnly declared that she would devote herself to this task, fervently and faithfully. That she would never waver in it, never be diverted from it, never relinquish it while there was any chance of hope. If she were not true to it, might the object she now had in life, which bound her to something devoid of evil, in its passing away from her, leave her more forlorn and more despairing, if that were possible, than she had been upon the river's brink that night; and then might all help, human and divine, renounce her evermore!

She did not raise her voice above her breath, or address us, but said this to the night sky; then stood profoundly quiet, looking at the gloomy water.

We judged it expedient, now, to tell her all we knew; which I recounted at length. She listened with great attention, and with a face that often

changed, but had the same purpose in all its varying expressions. Her eyes occasionally filled with tears, but those she repressed. It seemed as if her spirit were quite altered, and she could not be too quiet.

She asked, when all was told, where we were to be communicated with, if occasion should arise. Under a dull lamp in the road, I wrote our two addresses on a leaf of my pocket-book, which I tore out and gave to her, and which she put in her poor bosom. I asked her where she lived herself. She said, after a pause, in no place long. It were better not to know.

Mr. Peggotty suggesting to me, in a whisper, what had already occurred to myself, I took out my purse; but I could not prevail upon her to accept any money, nor could I exact any promise from her that she would do so at another time. I represented to her that Mr. Peggotty could not be called, for one in his condition, poor; and that the idea of her engaging in this search, while depending on her own resources, shocked us both. She continued steadfast. In this particular his influence upon her was equally powerless with mine. She gratefully thanked him, but remained inexorable.

"There may be work to be got," she said. "I'll try."

"At least take some assistance," I returned, "until you have tried."

"I could not do what I have promised for money," she replied. "I could not take it if I was starving. To give me money would be to take away your trust, to take away the object that you have given me, to take away the only thing certain that saves me from the river."

"In the name of the great Judge," said I, "before whom you and all of us must stand at his dread time, dismiss that terrible idea! We can all do some good if we will."

She trembled, and her lip shook, and her face was paler, as she answered,—

"It has been put into your hearts, perhaps, to save a wretched creature for repentance. I am afraid to think so; it seems too bold. If any good should come of me, I might begin to hope; for nothing but harm has ever come of my deeds yet. I am to be trusted, for the first time in a long while, with my miserable life, on account of what you have given me to try for. I know no more, and I can say no more."

Again she repressed the tears that had begun to flow; and, putting out her trembling hand, and touching Mr. Peggotty, as if there was some healing virtue in him, went away along the desolate road. She had been ill, probably for a long time. I observed, upon that closer opportunity of observation, that she was worn and haggard, and that her sunken eyes expressed privation and endurance.

We followed her at a short distance, our way lying in the same direction, until we came back into the lighted and populous streets. I had such implicit confidence in her declaration, that I then put it to Mr. Peggotty, whether it would not seem, in the onset, like distrusting her, to follow her any farther. He being of the same mind, and equally reliant on her, we suffered her to take her own road, and took ours, which was towards Highgate. He accompanied me a good part of the way; and when we parted, with a prayer for the success of this

fresh effort, there was a new and thoughtful compassion in him that I was at no loss to interpret.

It was midnight when I arrived at home. I had reached my own gate, and was standing listening to the deep bell of St. Paul's, the sound of which I thought had been borne towards me among the multitude of striking clocks, when I was rather surprised to see that the door of my aunt's cottage was open, and that a faint light in the entry was shining out across the road.

Thinking that my aunt might have relapsed into one of her old alarms, and might be watching the progress of some imaginary conflagration in the distance, I went to speak to her. It was with very great surprise that I saw a man standing in her little garden.

He had a glass and bottle in his hand, and was in the act of drinking. I stopped short, among the thick foliage outside, for the moon was up now, though obscured; and I recognized the man whom I had once supposed to be a delusion of Mr. Dick's, and had once encountered with my aunt in the streets of the city.

He was eating as well as drinking, and seemed to eat with a hungry appetite. He seemed curious regarding the cottage, too, as if it were the first time he had seen it. After stooping to put the bottle on the ground, he looked up at the windows, and looked about; though with a covert and impatient air, as if he was anxious to be gone.

The light in the passage was obscured for a moment, and my aunt came out. She was agitated, and told some money into his hand. I heard it chink.

"What's the use of this?" he demanded.

"I can spare no more," returned my aunt.

"Then I can't go," said he. "Here! You may take it back!"

"You bad man," returned my aunt with great emotion; "how can you use me so? But why do I ask? It is because you know how weak I am! What have I to do, to free myself forever of your visits, but to abandon you to your deserts?"

"And why don't you abandon me to my deserts?" said he.

"You ask me why!" returned my aunt. "What a heart you must have!"

He stood moodily rattling the money, and shaking his head, until at length he said. —

"Is this all you mean to give me, then?"

"It is all I *can* give you," said my aunt. "You know I have had losses, and am poorer than I used to be. I have told you so. Having got it, why do you give me the pain of looking at you for another moment, and seeing what you have become?"

"I have become shabby enough, if you mean that," he said. "I lead the life of an owl."

"You stripped me of the greater part of all I ever had," said my aunt. "You closed my heart against the whole world, years and years. You treated me falsely, ungratefully, and cruelly. Go, and repent of it. Don't add new injuries to the long, long list of injuries you have done me!"

"Ay!" he returned. "It's all very fine!—Well! I must do the best I can, for the present, I suppose."

In spite of himself, he appeared abashed by my aunt's indignant tears, and came slouching out of

the garden. Taking two or three quick steps, as if I had just come up, I met him at the gate, and went in as he came out. We eyed one another narrowly in passing, and with no favor.

"Aunt," said I hurriedly, "this man alarming you again! Let me speak to him. Who is he?"

"Child," returned my aunt, taking my arm, "come in, and don't speak to me for ten minutes."

We sat down in her little parlor. My aunt retired behind the round green fan of former days, which was screwed on the back of a chair, and occasionally wiped her eyes, for about a quarter of an hour. Then she came out, and took a seat beside me.

"Trot," said my aunt calmly, "it's my husband."

"Your husband, aunt? I thought he had been dead!"

"Dead to me," returned my aunt, "but living."

I sat in silent amazement.

"Betsey Trotwood don't look a likely subject for the tender passion," said my aunt composedly, "but the time was, Trot, when she believed in that man most entirely. When she loved him, Trot, right well. When there was no proof of attachment and affection that she would not have given him. He repaid her by breaking her fortune, and nearly breaking her heart. So she put all that sort of sentiment, once and forever, in a grave, and filled it up, and flattened it down."

"My dear, good aunt!"

"I left him," my aunt proceeded, laying her hand as usual on the back of mine, "generously. I may say at this distance of time, Trot, that I left him generously. He had been so cruel to me, that I

might have effected a separation on easy terms for myself; but I did not. He soon made ducks and drakes of what I gave him, sank lower and lower, married another woman, I believe, became an adventurer, a gambler, and a cheat. What he is now, you see. But he was a fine-looking man when I married him," said my aunt, with an echo of her old pride and admiration in her tone; "and I believed him — I was a fool! — to be the soul of honor!"

She gave my hand a squeeze, and shook her head.

"He is nothing to me now, Trot — less than nothing. But, sooner than have him punished for his offences (as he would be if he prowled about in this country), I give him more money than I can afford, at intervals when he re-appears, to go away. I was a fool when I married him; and I am so far an incurable fool on that subject, that, for the sake of what I once believed him to be, I wouldn't have even this shadow of my idle fancy hardly dealt with. For I was in earnest, Trot, if ever a woman was."

My aunt dismissed the matter with a heavy sigh, and smoothed her dress.

"There, my dear!" she said. "Now you know the beginning, middle, and end, and all about it. We won't mention the subject to one another any more; neither, of course, will you mention it to anybody else. This is my grumpy, frumpy story, and we'll keep it to ourselves, Trot!"

CHAPTER IX.

DOMESTIC.

I LABORED hard at my book, without allowing it to interfere with the punctual discharge of my newspaper duties; and it came out, and was very successful. I was not stunned by the praise which sounded in my ears, notwithstanding that I was keenly alive to it, and thought better of my own performance, I have little doubt, than anybody else did. It has always been in my observation of human nature, that a man who has any good reason to believe in himself never flourishes himself before the faces of other people in order that they may believe in him. For this reason I retained my modesty in very self-respect; and the more praise I got, the more I tried to deserve.

It is not my purpose, in this record, though in all other essentials it is my written memory, to pursue the history of my own fictions. They express themselves, and I leave them to themselves. When I refer to them incidentally, it is only as a part of my progress.

Having some foundation for believing, by this time, that nature and accident had made me an author, I pursued my vocation with confidence.

Without such assurance I should certainly have left it alone, and bestowed my energy on some other endeavor. I should have tried to find out what nature and accident really had made me, and to be that, and nothing else.

I had been writing, in the newspaper and elsewhere, so prosperously, that when my new success was achieved, I considered myself reasonably entitled to escape from the dreary debates. One joyful night, therefore, I noted down the music of the parliamentary bagpipes for the last time, and I have never heard it since; though I still recognize the old drone in the newspapers, without any substantial variation (except, perhaps, that there is more of it) all the livelong session.

I now write of the time when I had been married, I suppose, about a year and a half. After several varieties of experiment, we had given up the house-keeping as a bad job. The house kept itself, and we kept a page. The principal function of this retainer was to quarrel with the cook; in which respect he was a perfect Whittington, without his cat, or the remotest chance of being made Lord Mayor.

He appears to me to have lived in a hail of saucepan lids. His whole existence was a scuffle. He would shriek for help on the most improper occasions, — as when we had a little dinner-party, or a few friends in the evening, — and would come tumbling out of the kitchen, with iron missiles flying after him. We wanted to get rid of him, but he was very much attached to us, and wouldn't go. He was a tearful boy, and broke into such deplorable lamentations, when a cessation of our connection was hinted at, that we were obliged to keep him.

He had no mother — no anything in the way of a relative, that I could discover, except a sister, who fled to America the moment we had taken him off her hands; and he became quartered on us like a horrible young changeling. He had a lively perception of his own unfortunate state, and was always rubbing his eyes with the sleeve of his jacket, or stooping to blow his nose on the extreme corner of a little pocket-handkerchief, which he never *would* take completely out of his pocket, but always economized and secreted.

This unlucky page, engaged in an evil hour at six pounds ten per annum, was a source of continual trouble to me. I watched him as he grew — and he grew like scarlet beans — with painful apprehensions of the time when he would begin to shave; even of the days when he would be bald or gray. I saw no prospect of ever getting rid of him; and, projecting myself into the future, used to think what an inconvenience he would be when he was an old man.

I never expected anything less than this unfortunate's manner of getting me out of my difficulty. He stole Dora's watch, which, like everything else belonging to us, had no particular place of its own; and, converting it into money, spent the produce (he was always a weak-minded boy) in incessantly riding up and down between London and Uxbridge outside the coach. He was taken to Bow Street, as well as I remember, on the completion of his fifteenth journey; when four and sixpence, and a second-hand fife which he couldn't play, were found upon his person.

The surprise and its consequences would have

been much less disagreeable to me if he had not been penitent. But he was very penitent indeed, and in a peculiar way — not in the lump, but by instalments. For example: the day after that on which I was obliged to appear against him, he made certain revelations touching a hamper in the cellar, which we believed to be full of wine, but which had nothing in it except bottles and corks. We supposed he had now eased his mind, and told the worst he knew of the cook; but, a day or two afterwards, his conscience sustained a new twinge, and he disclosed how she had a little girl, who, early every morning, took away our bread; and also how he himself had been suborned to maintain the milkman in coals. In two or three days more, I was informed by the authorities of his having led to the discovery of sirloins of beef among the kitchen-stuff, and sheets in the rag-bag. A little while afterwards, he broke out in an entirely new direction, and confessed to a knowledge of burglarious intentions as to our premises, on the part of the potboy, who was immediately taken up. I got to be so ashamed of being such a victim, that I would have given him any money to hold his tongue, or would have offered a round bribe for his being permitted to run away. It was an aggravating circumstance in the case that he had no idea of this, but conceived that he was making me amends in every new discovery: not to say heaping obligations on my head.

At last I ran away myself, whenever I saw an emissary of the police approaching with some new intelligence; and lived a stealthy life until he was tried and ordered to be transported. Even then he couldn't be quiet, but was always writing us letters;

and wanted so much to see Dora before he went away, that Dora went to visit him, and fainted when she found herself inside the iron bars. In short, I had no peace of my life until he was expatriated, and made (as I afterwards heard) a shepherd of, "up the country" somewhere; I have no geographical idea where.

All this led me into some serious reflections, and presented our mistakes in a new aspect; as I could not help communicating to Dora one evening, in spite of my tenderness for her.

"My love," said I, "it is very painful to me to think that our want of system and management involves not only ourselves (which we have got used to), but other people."

"You have been silent for a long time, and now you are going to be cross!" said Dora.

"No, my dear, indeed! Let me explain to you what I mean."

"I think I don't want to know," said Dora.

"But I want you to know, my love. Put Jip down."

Dora put his nose to mine, and said "Boh!" to drive my seriousness away; but, not succeeding, ordered him into his pagoda, and sat looking at me, with her hands folded, and a most resigned little expression of countenance.

"The fact is, my dear," I began, "there is contagion in us. We infect every one about us."

I might have gone on in this figurative manner, if Dora's face had not admonished me that she was wondering with all her might whether I was going to propose any new kind of vaccination, or other medical remedy, for this unwholesome state of ours.

Therefore I checked myself, and made my meaning plainer.

"It is not merely, my pet," said I, "that we lose money and comfort, and even temper sometimes, by not learning to be more careful; but that we incur the serious responsibility of spoiling every one who comes into our service, or has any dealings with us. I begin to be afraid that the fault is not entirely on one side, but that these people all turn out ill because we don't turn out very well ourselves."

"Oh, what an accusation," exclaimed Dora, opening her eyes wide, "to say that you ever saw me take gold watches! Oh!"

"My dearest," I remonstrated, "don't talk preposterous nonsense! Who has made the least allusion to gold watches?"

"You did," returned Dora. "You know you did. You said I hadn't turned out well, and compared me to him."

"To whom?" I asked.

"To the page," sobbed Dora. "Oh, you cruel fellow, to compare your affectionate wife to a transported page! Why didn't you tell me your opinion of me before we were married? Why didn't you say, you hard-hearted thing, that you were convinced I was worse than a transported page? Oh, what a dreadful opinion to have of me! Oh, my goodness!"

"Now, Dora, my love," I returned, gently trying to remove the handkerchief she pressed to her eyes, "this is not only very ridiculous of you, but very wrong. In the first place, it's not true."

"You always said he was a story-teller," sobbed Dora. "And now you say the same of me! Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do?"

"My darling girl," I retorted, "I really must entreat you to be reasonable, and listen to what I did say and do say. My dear Dora, unless we learn to do our duty to those whom we employ, they will never learn to do their duty to us. I am afraid we present opportunities to people to do wrong, that never ought to be presented. Even if we were as lax as we are, in all our arrangements, by choice — which we are not — even if we liked it, and found it agreeable to be so — which we don't — I am persuaded we should have no right to go on in this way. We are positively corrupting people. We are bound to think of that. I can't help thinking of it, Dora. It is a reflection I am unable to dismiss, and it sometimes makes me very uneasy. There, dear, that's all. Come, now. Don't be foolish!"

Dora would not allow me, for a long time, to remove the handkerchief. She sat sobbing and murmuring behind it, that, if I was uneasy, why had I ever been married? Why hadn't I said, even the day before we went to church, that I knew I should be uneasy, and I would rather not? If I couldn't bear her, why didn't I send her away to her aunts at Putney, or to Julia Mills in India? Julia would be glad to see her, and would not call her a transported page; Julia never had called her anything of the sort. In short, Dora was so afflicted, and so afflicted me by being in that condition, that I felt it was of no use repeating this kind of effort, though never so mildly, and I must take some other course.

What other course was left to take? To "form her mind!" This was a common phrase of words, which had a fair and promising sound, and I resolved to form Dora's mind.

I began immediately. When Dora was very childish, and I would have infinitely preferred to humor her, I tried to be grave — and disconcerted her, and myself too. I talked to her on the subjects which occupied my thoughts; and I read Shakespeare to her — and fatigued her to the last degree. I accustomed myself to giving her, as it were quite casually, little scraps of useful information, or sound opinion — and she started from them, when I let them off, as if they had been crackers. No matter how incidentally or naturally I endeavored to form my little wife's mind, I could not help seeing that she always had an instinctive perception of what I was about, and became a prey to the keenest apprehensions. In particular, it was clear to me, that she thought Shakespeare a terrible fellow. The formation went on very slowly.

I pressed Traddles into the service without his knowledge; and, whenever he came to see us, exploded my mines upon him for the edification of Dora at second-hand. The amount of practical wisdom I bestowed upon Traddles in this manner was immense, and of the best quality; but it had no other effect upon Dora than to depress her spirits, and make her always nervous with the dread that it would be her turn next. I found myself in the condition of a schoolmaster, a trap, a pitfall; of always playing spider to Dora's fly, and always pouncing out of my hole to her infinite disturbance.

Still, looking forward through this intermediate stage, to the time when there should be a perfect sympathy between Dora and me, and when I should have "formed her mind" to my entire satisfaction, I persevered, even for months. Finding at last,

however, that, although I had been all this time a very poreupine or hedgehog, bristling all over with determination, I had effected nothing, it began to occur to me that perhaps Dora's mind was already formed.

On further consideration this appeared so likely, that I abandoned my scheme, which had had a more promising appearance in words than in action; resolving henceforth to be satisfied with my child-wife, and to try to change her into nothing else by any process. I was heartily tired of being sagacious and prudent by myself, and of seeing my darling under restraint; so, I bought a pretty pair of ear-rings for her, and a collar for Jip, and went home one day to make myself agreeable.

Dora was delighted with the little presents, and kissed me joyfully; but, there was a shadow between us, however slight, and I had made up my mind that it should not be there. If there must be such a shadow anywhere, I would keep it for the future in my own breast.

I sat down by my wife on the sofa, and put the ear-rings in her ears; and then I told her that I feared we had not been quite as good company lately as we used to be, and that the fault was mine. Which I sincerely felt, and which, indeed, it was.

"The truth is, Dora, my life," I said, "I have been trying to be wise."

"And to make me wise too," said Dora timidly. "Haven't you, Doady?"

I nodded assent to the pretty inquiry of the raised eyebrows, and kissed the parted lips.

"It's of not a bit of use," said Dora, shaking her head until the ear-rings rang again. "You know

what a little thing I am, and what I wanted you to call me from the first. If you can't do so, I am afraid you'll never like me. Are you sure you don't think, sometimes, it would have been better to have —"

"Done what, my dear?" for she made no effort to proceed.

"Nothing!" said Dora.

"Nothing?" I repeated.

She put her arms round my neck, and laughed, and called herself by her favorite name of a goose, and hid her face on my shoulder in such a profusion of curls that it was quite a task to clear them away and see it.

"Don't I think it would have been better to have done nothing than to have tried to form my little wife's mind?" said I, laughing at myself. "Is that the question? Yes, indeed, I do."

"Is that what you have been trying?" cried Dora. "Oh, what a shocking boy!"

"But I shall never try any more," said I. "For I love her dearly as she is."

"Without a story — really?" inquired Dora, creeping closer to me.

"Why should I seek to change," said I, "what has been so precious to me for so long? You never can show better than as your own natural self, my sweet Dora! and we'll try no conceited experiments but go back to our old way, and be happy."

"And be happy!" returned Dora. "Yes! All day! And you won't mind things going a tiny morsel wrong sometimes?"

"No, no," said I. "We must do the best we can."

"And you won't tell me, any more, that we make

other people bad," coaxed Dora; "will you? Because you know it's so dreadfully cross."

"No, no," said I.

"It's better for me to be stupid than uncomfortable, isn't it?" said Dora.

"Better to be naturally Dora than anything else in the world."

"In the world! Ah, Doady, it's a large place!"

She shook her head, turned her delighted bright eyes up to mine, kissed me, broke into a merry laugh, and sprang away to put on Jip's new collar.

So ended my last attempt to make any change in Dora. I had been unhappy in trying it; I could not endure my own solitary wisdom; I could not reconcile it with her former appeal to me as my child-wife. I resolved to do what I could in a quiet way, to improve our proceedings myself; but I foresaw that my utmost would be very little, or I must degenerate into the spider again, and be forever lying in wait.

And the shadow I have mentioned, that was not to be between us any more, but was to rest wholly on my own heart? How did that fall?

The old unhappy feeling pervaded my life. It was deepened, if it were changed at all; but it was as undefined as ever, and addressed me like a strain of sorrowful music faintly heard in the night. I loved my wife dearly, and I was happy; but the happiness I had vaguely anticipated, once, was not the happiness I enjoyed, and there was always something wanting.

In fulfilment of the compact I have made with myself, to reflect my mind on this paper, I again examine it closely, and bring its secrets to the light.

What I missed, I still regarded — I always regarded — as something that had been a dream of my youthful fancy ; that was incapable of realization ; that I was now discovering to be so, with some natural pain, as all men did. But, that it would have been better for me if my wife could have helped me more, and shared the many thoughts in which I had no partner : and that this might have been ; I knew.

Between these two irreconcilable conclusions : the one, that what I felt was general and unavoidable ; the other, that it was particular to me, and might have been different : I balanced curiously, with no distinct sense of their opposition to each other. When I thought of the airy dreams of youth that are incapable of realization, I thought of the better state preceding manhood that I had outgrown ; and then the contented days with Agnes, in the dear old house, arose before me, like spectres of the dead, that might have some renewal in another world, but never never more could be re-animated here.

Sometimes the speculation came into my thoughts, What might have happened, or what would have happened, if Dora and I had never known each other ? But, she was so incorporated with my existence, that it was the idlest of all fancies, and would soon rise out of my reach and sight, like gossamer floating in the air.

I always loved her. What I am describing, slumbered, and half awoke, and slept again in the innermost recesses of my mind. There was no evidence of it in me ; I know of no influence it had in anything I said or did. I bore the weight of all our little cares, and all my projects ; Dora held the pens ; and we both felt that our shares were adjusted as

the case required. She was truly fond of me, and proud of me ; and when Agnes wrote a few earnest words in her letters to Dora, of the pride and interest with which my old friends heard of my growing reputation, and read my book as if they heard me speaking its contents, Dora read them out to me with tears of joy in her bright eyes, and said I was a dear old, clever, famous boy.

"The first mistaken impulse of an undisciplined heart." These words of Mrs. Strong's were constantly recurring to me at this time ; were almost always present to my mind. I awake with them, often, in the night ; I remember to have even read them, in dreams, inscribed upon the walls of houses. For I knew, now, that my own heart was undisciplined when it first loved Dora ; and that, if it had been disciplined, it never could have felt, when we were married, what it had felt in its secret experience.

"There can be no disparity in marriage like unsuitability of mind and purpose." Those words I remembered, too. I had endeavored to adapt Dora to myself, and found it impracticable. It remained for me to adapt myself to Dora ; to share with her what I could, and be happy ; to bear on my own shoulders what I must, and be happy still. This was the discipline to which I tried to bring my heart, when I began to think. It made my second year much happier than my first ; and, what was better still, made Dora's life all sunshine.

But, as that year wore on, Dora was not strong. I had hoped that lighter hands than mine would help to mould her character, and that a baby-smile upon her breast might change my child-wife to a

woman. It was not to be. The spirit fluttered for a moment on the threshold of its little prison, and, unconscious of captivity, took wing.

"When I can run about again, as I used to do, aunt," said Dora, "I shall make Jip race. He is getting quite slow and lazy."

"I suspect, my dear," said my aunt, quietly working by her side, "he has a worse disorder than that. Age, Dora."

"Do you think he is old?" said Dora, astonished. "Oh, how strange it seems that Jip should be old!"

"It's a complaint we are all liable to, Little One, as we get on in life," said my aunt cheerfully: "I don't feel more free from it than I used to be, I assure you."

"But Jip," said Dora, looking at him with compassion, "even little Jip! Oh, poor fellow!"

"I dare say he'll last a long time yet, Blossom," said my aunt, patting Dora on the cheek, as she leaned out of her couch to look at Jip, who responded by standing on his hind-legs, and balking himself in various asthmatic attempts to scramble up by the head and shoulders. "He must have a piece of flannel in his house this winter, and I shouldn't wonder if he came out quite fresh again, with the flowers in the spring. Bless the little dog!" exclaimed my aunt, "if he had as many lives as a cat, and was on the point of losing 'em all, he'd bark at me with his last breath, I believe!"

Dora had helped him up on the sofa; where he really was defying my aunt to such a furious extent, that he couldn't keep straight, but barked himself sideways. The more my aunt looked at him, the more he reproached her; for she had lately taken to

spectacles, and for some inscrutable reason he considered the glasses personal.

Dora made him lie down by her with a good deal of persuasion; and, when he was quiet, drew one of his long ears through and through her hand, repeating thoughtfully, "Even little Jip! Oh, poor fellow!"

"His lungs are good enough," said my aunt gayly, "and his dislikes are not at all feeble. He has a good many years before him, no doubt. But if you want a dog to race with, Little Blossom, he has lived too well for that, and I'll give you one."

"Thank you, aunt," said Dora faintly. "But don't, please!"

"No?" said my aunt, taking off her spectacles.

"I couldn't have any other dog but Jip," said Dora. "It would be so unkind to Jip! Besides, I couldn't be such friends with any other dog but Jip; because he wouldn't have known me before I was married, and wouldn't have barked at Doady when he first came to our house. I couldn't care for any other dog but Jip, I am afraid, aunt."

"To be sure!" said my aunt, patting her cheek again. "You are right."

"You are not offended," said Dora. "Are you?"

"Why, what a sensitive pet it is!" cried my aunt, bending over her affectionately. "To think that I could be offended."

"No, no, I didn't really think so," returned Dora; "but I am a little tired, and it made me silly for a moment—I am always a silly little thing, you know; but it made me more silly—to talk about Jip. He has known me in all that has happened to me, haven't you, Jip? And I couldn't bear to

slight him, because he was a little altered — could I, Jip?"

Jip nestled closer to his mistress, and lazily licked her hand.

"You are not so old, Jip, are you, that you'll leave your mistress yet?" said Dora. "We may keep one another company a little longer!"

My pretty Dora! When she came down to dinner on the ensuing Sunday, and was so glad to see old Traddles (who always dined with us on Sunday), we thought she would be "running about as she used to do" in a few days. But they said, wait a few days more; and then, wait a few days more; and still she neither ran nor walked. She looked very pretty, and was very merry; but the little feet, that used to be so nimble when they danced round Jip, were dull and motionless.

I began to carry her downstairs every morning, and upstairs every night. She would clasp me round the neck and laugh, the while, as if I did it for a wager. Jip would bark and caper round us, and go on before, and look back on the landing, breathing short, to see that we were coming. My aunt, the best and most cheerful of nurses, would trudge after us, a moving mass of shawls and pillows. Mr. Dick would not have relinquished his post of candle-bearer to any one alive. Traddles would be often at the bottom of the staircase, looking on, and taking charge of sportive messages from Dora to the dearest girl in the world. We made quite a gay procession of it, and my child-wife was the gayest there.

But, sometimes, when I took her up, and felt that she was lighter in my arms, a dead blank feeling came upon me, as if I were approaching to some

frozen region yet unseen, that numbed my life. I avoided the recognition of this feeling by any name, or by any communing with myself ; until one night, when it was very strong upon me, and my aunt had left her with a parting cry of "Good-night, Little Blossom," I sat down at my desk alone, and cried to think, Oh, what a fatal name it was, and how the blossom withered in its bloom upon the tree !

CHAPTER X.

I AM INVOLVED IN MYSTERY.

I RECEIVED one morning, by the post, the following letter, dated Canterbury, and addressed to me at Doctors' Commons, which I read with some surprise : —

“MY DEAR SIR: — Circumstances beyond my individual control have, for a considerable lapse of time, effected a severance of that intimacy which, in the limited opportunities conceded to me, in the midst of my professional duties, of contemplating the scenes and events of the past, tinged by the prismatic hues of memory, has ever afforded me, as it ever must continue to afford, gratifying emotions of no common description. This fact, my dear sir, combined with the distinguished elevation to which your talents have raised you, deters me from presuming to aspire to the liberty of addressing the companion of my youth by the familiar appellation of Copperfield ! It is sufficient to know that the name to which I do myself the honor to refer will ever be treasured among the muniments of our house (I allude to the archives connected with our former lodgers, preserved by Mrs. Micawber), with

sentiments of personal esteem amounting to affection.

"It is not for one situated, through his original errors and a fortuitous combination of unpropitious events, as is the foundered Bark (if he may be allowed to assume so maritime a denomination), who now takes up the pen to address you—it is not, I repeat, for one so circumstanced to adopt the language of compliment or of congratulation. That he leaves to abler and to purer hands.

"If your more important avocations should admit of your ever tracing these imperfect characters thus far—which may be, or may not be, as circumstances arise—you will naturally inquire by what object am I influenced, then, in inditing the present missive? Allow me to say that I fully defer to the reasonable character of that inquiry, and proceed to develop it; premising that it is *not* an object of a pecuniary nature.

"Without more directly referring to any latent ability that may possibly exist, on my part, of wielding the thunderbolt, or directing the devouring and avenging flame in any quarter, I may be permitted to observe, in passing, that my brightest visions are forever dispelled—that my peace is shattered and my power of enjoyment destroyed—that my heart is no longer in the right place—and that I no more walk erect before my fellow-man. The canker is in the flower. The cup is bitter to the brim. The worm is at his work, and will soon dispose of his victim. The sooner the better. But I will not digress.

"Placed in a mental position of peculiar painfulness, beyond the assuaging reach even of Mrs.

Micawber's influence, though exercised in the tripartite character of woman, wife, and mother, it is my intention to fly from myself for a short period, and devote a respite of eight and forty hours to revisiting some metropolitan scenes of past enjoyment. Among other havens of domestic tranquillity and peace of mind, my feet will naturally tend towards the King's Bench Prison. In stating that I shall be (D.V.) on the outside of the south wall of that place of incarceration on civil process, the day after to-morrow, at seven in the evening precisely, my object in this epistolary communication is accomplished.

"I do not feel warranted in soliciting my former friend Mr. Copperfield, or my former friend Mr. Thomas Traddles of the Inner Temple, if that gentleman is still existent and forthcoming, to condescend to meet me, and renew (so far as may be) our past relations of the olden time. I confine myself to throwing out the observation that, at the hour and place I have indicated, may be found such ruined vestiges as yet

"Remain,

"Of

"A

"Fallen Tower,

"WILKINS MICAWBER."

"P.S. It may be advisable to superadd to the above the statement that Mrs. Micawber is *not* in confidential possession of my intentions."

I read the letter over several times. Making due allowance for Mr. Micawber's lofty style of composition, and for the extraordinary relish with which

he sat down and wrote long letters on all possible and impossible occasions, I still believed that something important lay hidden at the bottom of this roundabout communication. I put it down, to think about it; and took it up again, to read it once more; and was still perusing it, when Traddles found me in the height of my perplexity.

"My dear fellow," said I, "I never was better pleased to see you. You come to give me the benefit of your sober judgment at a most opportune time. I have received a very singular letter, Traddles, from Mr. Micawber."

"No!" cried Traddles. "You don't say so! And I have received one from Mrs. Micawber!"

With that, Traddles, who was flushed with walking, and whose hair, under the combined effects of exercise and excitement, stood on end as if he saw a cheerful ghost, produced his letter, and made an exchange with me. I watched him into the heart of Mr. Micawber's letter, and returned the elevation of eyebrows with which he said "'Wielding the thunderbolt, or directing the devouring and avenging flame!' Bless me, Copperfield!"—and then entered on the perusal of Mrs. Micawber's epistle.

It ran thus:—

"My best regards to Mr. Thomas Traddles, and if he should still remember one who formerly had the happiness of being well acquainted with him, may I beg a few moments of his leisure time? I assure Mr. T. T. that I would not intrude upon his kindness, were I in any other position than on the confines of distraction.

"Though harrowing to myself to mention, the

alienation of Mr. Micawber (formerly so domesticated) from his wife and family is the cause of my addressing my unhappy appeal to Mr. Traddles, and soliciting his best indulgence. Mr. T. can form no adequate idea of the change in Mr. Micawber's conduct, of his wildness, of his violence. It has gradually augmented, until it assumes the appearance of aberration of intellect. Scarcely a day passes, I assure Mr. Traddles, on which some paroxysm does not take place. Mr. T. will not require me to depict my feelings when I inform him that I have been accustomed to hear Mr. Micawber assert that he has sold himself to the D. Mystery and secrecy have long been his principal characteristic, have long replaced unlimited confidence. The slightest provocation, even being asked if there is anything he would prefer for dinner, causes him to express a wish for a separation. Last night, on being childishly solicited for twopence, to buy 'lemon-stunners' — a local sweetmeat — he presented an oyster knife at the twins!

"I entreat Mr. Traddles to bear with me in entering into these details. Without them, Mr. T. would indeed find it difficult to form the faintest conception of my heart-rending situation.

"May I now venture to confide to Mr. T. the purport of my letter? Will he now allow me to throw myself on his friendly consideration? Oh yes, for I know his heart!

"The quick eye of affection is not easily blinded, when of the female sex. Mr. Micawber is going to London. Though he studiously concealed his hand, this morning before breakfast, in writing the direction-card which he attached to the little brown

valise of happier days, the eagle glance of matrimonial anxiety detected d, o, n, distinctly traced. The West-end destination of the coach is the Golden Cross. Dare I fervently implore Mr. T. to see my misguided husband, and to reason with him? Dare I ask Mr. T. to endeavor to step in between Mr. Micawber and his agonized family? Oh, no, for that would be too much!

"If Mr. Copperfield should yet remember one unknown to fame, will Mr. T. take charge of my unalterable regards and similar entreaties? In any case, he will have the benevolence *to consider this communication strictly private, and on no account whatever to be alluded to, however distantly, in the presence of Mr. Micawber.* If Mr. T. should ever reply to it (which I cannot but feel to be *most* improbable), a letter addressed to M. E. Post Office, Canterbury, will be fraught with less painful consequences than any addressed immediately to one, who subscribes herself in extreme distress,

"Mr. Thomas Traddles's respectful friend and
suppliant,

"EMMA MICAWBER."

"What do you think of that letter?" said Traddles, casting his eyes upon me, when I had read it twice.

"What do you think of the other?" said I. For he was still reading it with knitted brows.

"I think that the two together, Copperfield," replied Traddles, "mean more than Mr. and Mrs. Micawber usually mean in their correspondence—but I don't know what. They are both written in good faith, I have no doubt, and without any collu-

sion. Poor thing!" he was now alluding to Mrs. Micawber's letter, and we were standing side by side, comparing the two; "it will be a charity to write to her, at all events, and tell her that we will not fail to see Mr. Micawber."

I acceded to this, the more readily, because I now reproached myself with having treated her former letter rather lightly. It had set me thinking a good deal at the time, as I have mentioned in its place; but my absorption in my own affairs, my experience of the family, and my hearing nothing more, had gradually ended in my dismissing the subject. I had often thought of the Micawbers, but chiefly to wonder what "pecuniary liabilities" they were establishing in Canterbury, and to recall how shy Mr. Micawber was of me when he became clerk to Uriah Heep.

However, I now wrote a comforting letter to Mrs. Micawber, in our joint names, and we both signed it. As we walked into town to post it, Traddles and I held a long conference, and launched into a number of speculations, which I need not repeat. We took my aunt into our counsels in the afternoon; but our only decided conclusion was, that we would be very punctual in keeping Mr. Micawber's appointment.

Although we appeared at the stipulated place a quarter of an hour before the time, we found Mr. Micawber already there. He was standing, with his arms folded, over against the wall, looking at the spikes on the top, with a sentimental expression, as if they were the interlacing boughs of trees that had shaded him in his youth.

When we accosted him, his manner was some-

thing more confused, and something less genteel, than of yore. He had relinquished his legal suit of black for the purposes of this excursion, and wore the old surtout and tights, but not quite with the old air. He gradually picked up more and more of it as we conversed with him; but, his very eyeglass seemed to hang less easily, and his shirt-collar, though still of the old formidable dimensions, rather drooped.

"Gentlemen!" said Mr. Micawber after the first salutations, "you are friends in need, and friends indeed. Allow me to offer my inquiries with reference to the physical welfare of Mrs. Copperfield *in esse*, and Mrs. Traddles *in posse*, — presuming, that is to say, that my friend Mr. Traddles is not yet united to the object of his affections, for weal and for woe."

We acknowledged his politeness, and made suitable replies. He then directed our attention to the wall, and was beginning, "I assure you, gentlemen," when I ventured to object to that ceremonious form of address, and to beg that he would speak to us in the old way.

"My dear Copperfield," he returned, pressing my hand, "your cordiality overpowers me. This reception of a shattered fragment of the Temple once called Man — if I may be permitted so to express myself — bespeaks a heart that is an honor to our common nature. I was about to observe that I again behold the serene spot where some of the happiest hours of my existence fled by."

"Made so, I am sure, by Mrs. Micawber," said I. "I hope she is well?"

"Thank you," returned Mr. Micawber, whose face

clouded at this reference, "she is but so-so. And this," said Mr. Micawber, nodding his head sorrowfully, "is the Bench! Where, for the first time in many revolving years, the overwhelming pressure of pecuniary liabilities was not proclaimed, from day to day, by importunate voices declining to vacate the passage; where there was no knocker on the door for any creditor to appeal to; where personal service of process was not required, and detainers were merely lodged at the gate! Gentlemen," said Mr. Micawber, "when the shadow of that ironwork on the summit of the brick structure has been reflected on the gravel of the Parade, I have seen my children thread the mazes of the intricate pattern, avoiding the dark marks. I have been familiar with every stone in the place. If I betray weakness, you will know how to excuse me."

"We have all got on in life since then, Mr. Micawber," said I.

"Mr. Copperfield," returned Mr. Micawber bitterly, "when I was an inmate of that retreat I could look my fellow-man in the face, and punch his head if he offended me. My fellow-man and myself are no longer on those glorious terms!"

Turning from the building in a downcast manner, Mr. Micawber accepted my proffered arm on one side, and the proffered arm of Traddles on the other, and walked away between us.

"There are some landmarks," observed Mr. Micawber, looking fondly back over his shoulder, "on the road to the tomb, which, but for the impiety of the aspiration, a man would wish never to have passed. Such is the Bench in my checkered career."

"Oh, you are in low spirits, Mr. Micawber!" said Traddles.

"I am, sir," interposed Mr. Micawber.

"I hope," said Traddles, "it is not because you have conceived a dislike to the law—for I am a lawyer myself, you know."

Mr. Micawber answered not a word.

"How is our friend Heep, Mr. Micawber?" said I after a silence.

"My dear Copperfield," returned Mr. Micawber, bursting into a state of much excitement, and turning pale, "if you ask after my employer as *your* friend, I am sorry for it; if you ask after him as *my* friend, I sardonically smile at it. In whatever capacity you ask after my employer, I beg, without offence to you, to limit my reply to this—that whatever his state of health may be, his appearance is foxy: not to say diabolical. You will allow me, as a private individual, to decline pursuing a subject which has lashed me to the utmost verge of desperation in my professional capacity."

I expressed my regret for having innocently touched upon a theme that roused him so much. "May I ask," said I, "without any hazard of repeating the mistake, how my old friends Mr. and Miss Wickfield are?"

"Miss Wickfield," said Mr. Micawber, now turning red, "is, as she always is, a pattern, and a bright example. My dear Copperfield, she is the only starry spot in a miserable existence. My respect for that young lady, my admiration of her character, my devotion to her for her love and truth, and goodness!—Take me," said Mr. Micawber, "down a turning, for, upon my soul, in my present state of mind I am not equal to this!"

We wheeled him off into a narrow street, where

he took out his pocket-handkerchief, and stood with his back to a wall. If I looked as gravely at him as Traddles did, he must have found our company by no means inspiriting.

"It is my fate," said Mr. Micawber, unfeignedly sobbing, but doing even that with a shadow of the old expression of doing something genteel; "it is my fate, gentlemen, that the finer feelings of our nature have become reproaches to me. My homage to Miss Wickfield is a flight of arrows in my bosom. You had better leave me, if you please, to walk the earth as a vagabond. The worn will settle *my* business in double-quick time."

Without attending to this invocation, we stood by until he put up his pocket-handkerchief, pulled up his shirt-collar, and, to delude any person in the neighborhood who might have been observing him, hummed a tune with his hat very much on one side. I then mentioned — not knowing what might be lost if we lost sight of him yet — that it would give me great pleasure to introduce him to my aunt, if he would ride out to Highgate, where a bed was at his service.

"You shall make us a glass of your own punch, Mr. Micawber," said I, "and forget whatever you have on your mind, in pleasanter reminiscences."

"Or, if confiding anything to friends will be more likely to relieve you, you shall impart it to us, Mr. Micawber," said Traddles prudently.

"Gentlemen," returned Mr. Micawber, "do with me as you will! I am a straw upon the surface of the deep, and am tossed in all directions by the elephants — I beg your pardon; I should have said the elements."

We walked on, arm in arm, again; found the coach in the act of starting; and arrived at Highgate without encountering any difficulties by the way. I was very uneasy and very uncertain in my mind what to say or do for the best — so was Traddles, evidently. Mr. Micawber was, for the most part, plunged into deep gloom. He occasionally made an attempt to smarten himself, and hum the fag-end of a tune; but his relapses into profound melancholy were only made the more impressive by the mockery of a hat exceedingly on one side, and a shirt-collar pulled up to his eyes.

We went to my aunt's house rather than to mine, because of Dora's not being well. My aunt presented herself on being sent for, and welcomed Mr. Micawber with gracious cordiality. Mr. Micawber kissed her hand, retired to the window, and pulling out his pocket-handkerchief, had a mental wrestle with himself.

Mr. Dick was at home. He was by nature so exceedingly compassionate of any one who seemed to be ill at ease, and was so quick to find any such person out, that he shook hands with Mr. Micawber at least half a dozen times in five minutes. To Mr. Micawber, in his trouble, this warmth, on the part of a stranger, was so extremely touching, that he could only say, on the occasion of each successive shake, "My dear sir, you overpower me!" Which gratified Mr. Dick so much, that he went at it again with greater vigor than before.

"The friendliness of this gentleman," said Mr. Micawber to my aunt, "if you will allow me, ma'am, to cull a figure of speech from the vocabulary of our coarser national sports — floors me. To

a man who is struggling with a complicated burden of perplexity and disquiet, such a reception is trying, I assure you."

"My friend Mr. Dick," replied my aunt proudly, "is not a common man."

"That I am convinced of," said Mr. Micawber. "My dear sir!" for Mr. Dick was shaking hands with him again; "I am deeply sensible of your cordiality!"

"How do you find yourself?" said Mr. Dick with an anxious look.

"Indifferent, my dear sir," returned Mr. Micawber, sighing.

"You must keep up your spirits," said Mr. Dick, "and make yourself as comfortable as possible."

Mr. Micawber was quite overcome by these friendly words, and by finding Mr. Dick's hand again within his own. "It has been my lot," he observed, "to meet, in the diversified panorama of human existence, with an occasional oasis, but never with one so green, so gushing, as the present!"

At another time I should have been amused by this; but I felt that we were all constrained and uneasy, and I watched Mr. Micawber so anxiously, in his vacillations between an evident disposition to reveal something, and a counter-disposition to reveal nothing, that I was in a perfect fever. Traddles, sitting on the edge of his chair, with his eyes wide open, and his hair more emphatically erect than ever, stared by turns at the ground and at Mr. Micawber, without so much as attempting to put in a word. My aunt, though I saw that her shrewdest observation was concentrated on her new guest, had

more useful possession of her wits than either of us; for she held him in conversation, and made it necessary for him to talk, whether he liked it or not.

"You are a very old friend of my nephew's, Mr. Micawber," said my aunt. "I wish I had had the pleasure of seeing you before."

"Madam," returned Mr. Micawber, "I wish I had had the honor of knowing you at an earlier period. I was not always the wreck you at present behold."

"I hope Mrs. Micawber and your family are well, sir," said my aunt.

Mr. Micawber inclined his head. "They are as well, ma'am," he desperately observed after a pause, "as Aliens and Outcasts can ever hope to be."

"Lord bless you, sir!" exclaimed my aunt in her abrupt way. "What are you talking about?"

"The subsistence of my family, ma'am," returned Mr. Micawber, "trembles in the balance. My employer —"

Here Mr. Micawber provokingly left off; and began to peel the lemons that had been, under my directions, set before him, together with all the other appliances he used in making punch.

"Your employer, you know," said Mr. Dick, jogging his arm as a gentle reminder.

"My good sir," returned Mr. Micawber, "you recall me, I am obliged to you" They shook hands again. "My employer, ma'am — Mr. Heep — once did me the favor to observe to me, that if I were not in receipt of the stipendiary emoluments appertaining to my engagement with him, I should probably be a mountebank about the country swallowing a sword-blade, and eating the devouring element.

For anything that I can perceive to the contrary, it is still probable that my children may be reduced to seek a livelihood by personal contortion, while Mrs. Micawber abets their unnatural feats by playing the barrel-organ."

Mr. Micawber, with a random but expressive flourish of his knife, signified that these performances might be expected to take place after he was no more; then resumed his peeling with a desperate air.

My aunt leaned her elbow on the little round table that she usually kept beside her, and eyed him attentively. Notwithstanding the aversion with which I regarded the idea of entrapping him into any disclosure he was not prepared to make voluntarily, I should have taken him up at this point, but for the strange proceedings in which I saw him engaged; whereof his putting the lemon-peel into the kettle, the sugar into the snuffer-tray, the spirit into the empty jug, and confidently attempting to pour boiling water out of a candlestick, were among the most remarkable. I saw that a crisis was at hand, and it came. He clattered all his means and implements together, rose from his chair, pulled out his pocket-handkerchief, and burst into tears.

"My dear Copperfield," said Mr. Micawber behind his handkerchief, "this is an occupation, of all others, requiring an untroubled mind, and self-respect. I cannot perform it. It is out of the question."

"Mr. Micawber," said I, "what is the matter? Pray speak out. You are among friends."

"Among friends, sir!" repeated Mr. Micawber;

and all he had reserved came breaking out of him. "Good heavens, it is principally because I *am* among friends that my state of mind is what it is. What is the matter, gentlemen? What is *not* the matter? Villany is the matter; baseness is the matter; deception, fraud, conspiracy are the matter; and the name of the whole atrocious mass is — *HEEP!*"

My aunt clapped her hands, and we all started up as if we were possessed.

"The struggle is over!" said Mr. Micawber, violently gesticulating with his pocket-handkerchief, and fairly striking out from time to time with both arms, as if he were swimming under superhuman difficulties. "I will lead this life no longer. I am a wretched being, cut off from everything that makes life tolerable. I have been under a Taboo in that infernal scoundrel's service. Give me back my wife, give me back my family, substitute Micawber for the petty wretch who walks about in the boots at present on my feet, and call upon me to swallow a sword to-morrow, and I'll do it. With an appetite!"

I never saw a man so hot in my life. I tried to calm him, that we might come to something rational; but he got hotter and hotter, and wouldn't hear a word.

"I'll put my hand in no man's hand," said Mr. Micawber, gasping, puffing, and sobbing to that degree, that he was like a man fighting with cold water, "until I have — blown to fragments — the — a — detestable — serpent — *HEEP!* I'll partake of no one's hospitality, until I have — a — moved Mount Vesuvius — to eruption — on — a — the abandoned rascal — *HEEP.* Refreshment — a — un-

derneath this roof — particularly punch — would — a — choke me — unless — I had — previously — choked the eyes — out of the head — a — of — interminable cheat, and liar — HEEP! I — a — I'll know nobody — and — a — say nothing — and — a — live nowhere — until I have crushed — to — a — undiscoverable atoms — the — transcendent and immortal hypocrite and perjurer — HEEP!"

I really had some fear of Mr. Micawber's dying on the spot. The manner in which he struggled through these inarticulate sentences, and, whenever he found himself getting near the name of Heep, fought his way on to it, dashed at it in a fainting state, and brought it out with a vehemence little less than marvellous, was frightful; but now, when he sank into a chair, steaming, and looked at us, with every possible color in his face that had no business there, and an endless procession of lumps following one another in hot haste up his throat, whence they seemed to shoot into his forehead, he had the appearance of being in the last extremity. I would have gone to his assistance, but he waved me off, and wouldn't hear a word.

"No, Copperfield! — No communication — a — until — Miss Wickfield — a — redress from wrongs inflicted by consummate scoundrel — HEEP!" (I am quite convinced he could not have uttered three words, but for the amazing energy with which this word inspired him when he felt it coming.) "Inviolable secret — a — from the whole world — a — no exceptions — this day week — a — at breakfast time — a — everybody present — including aunt — a — and extremely friendly gentleman — to be at the hotel at Canterbury — a — where — Mrs. Micaw-

ber and myself — Auld Lang Syne in chorus — and — a — will expose intolerable ruffian — HEEP! No more to say — a — or listen to persuasion — go immediately — not capable — a — bear society — upon the track of devoted and doomed traitor — HEEP!”

With this last repetition of the magic word that had kept him going at all, and in which he surpassed all his previous efforts, Mr. Micawber rushed out of the house; leaving us in a state of excitement, hope, and wonder, that reduced us to a condition little better than his own. But even then his passion for writing letters was too strong to be resisted; for while we were yet in the height of our excitement, hope, and wonder, the following pastoral note was brought to me from a neighboring tavern, at which he had called to write it: —

“Most secret and confidential.

“MY DEAR SIR, — I beg to be allowed to convey, through you, my apologies to your excellent aunt for my late excitement. An explosion of a sinouldering volcano, long suppressed, was the result of an internal contest more easily conceived than described.

“I trust I rendered tolerably intelligible my appointment for the morning of this day week, at the house of public entertainment at Canterbury, where Mrs. Micawber and myself had once the honor of uniting our voices to yours in the well-known strain of the Immortal exciseman nurtured beyond the Tweed.

“The duty done, and act of reparation performed, which can alone enable me to contemplate my fellow-mortal, I shall be known no more. I shall

simply require to be deposited in that place of universal resort, where

‘ Each in his narrow cell forever laid,
The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep,’

“ — With the plain Inscription,
“ WILKINS MICAWBER.”

CHAPTER XI.

MR. PEGGOTTY'S DREAM COMES TRUE.

By this time, some months had passed since our interview on the bank of the river with Martha. I had never seen her since, but she had communicated with Mr. Peggotty on several occasions. Nothing had come of her zealous intervention; nor could I infer, from what he told me, that any clew had ever been obtained, for a moment, to Emily's fate. I confess that I began to despair of her recovery, and gradually to sink deeper and deeper into the belief that she was dead.

His conviction remained unchanged. So far as I know — and I believe his honest heart was transparent to me — he never wavered again in his solemn certainty of finding her. His patience never tired. And, although I trembled for the agony it might one day be to him to have his strong assurance shivered at a blow, there was something so religious in it, so affectingly expressive of its anchor being in the purest depths of his fine nature, that the respect and honor in which I held him were exalted every day.

His was not a lazy trustfulness that hoped, and did no more. He had been a man of sturdy action

all his life, and he knew that in all things wherein he wanted help he must do his own part faithfully, and help himself. I have known him set out in the night, on a misgiving that the light might not be, by some accident, in the window of the old boat, and walk to Yarmouth. I have known him, on reading something in the newspaper that might apply to her, take up his stick, and go forth on a journey of three or four score miles. He made his way by sea to Naples, and back, after hearing the narrative to which Miss Dartle had assisted me. All his journeys were ruggedly performed; for he was always steadfast in a purpose of saving money for Emily's sake, when she should be found. In all this long pursuit I never heard him repine; I never heard him say he was fatigued, or out of heart.

Dora had often seen him since our marriage, and was quite fond of him. I fancy his figure before me now, standing near her sofa, with his rough cap in his hand, and the blue eyes of my child-wife raised, with a timid wonder, to his face. Sometimes of an evening, about twilight, when he came to talk with me, I would induce him to smoke his pipe in the garden, as we slowly paced to and fro together; and then, the picture of his deserted home, and the comfortable air it used to have in my childish eyes of an evening when the fire was burning, and the wind moaning round it, came most vividly into my mind.

One evening, at this hour, he told me that he had found Martha waiting near his lodging on the preceding night when he came out, and that she had asked him not to leave London on any account until he should have seen her again.

"Did she tell you why?" I inquired.

"I asked her, Mas'r Davy," he replied, "but it is but few words as she ever says, and she on'y got my promise, and so went away."

"Did she say when you might expect to see her again?" I demanded.

"No, Mas'r Davy," he returned, drawing his hand thoughtfully down his face. "I asked that too; but it was more (she said) than she could tell."

As I had long forborne to encourage him with hopes that hung on threads, I made no other comment on this information than that I supposed he would see her soon. Such speculations as it engendered within me I kept to myself, and those were faint enough.

I was walking alone in the garden, one evening, about a fortnight afterwards. I remember that evening well. It was the second in Mr. Micawber's week of suspense. There had been rain all day, and there was a damp feeling in the air. The leaves were thick upon the trees, and heavy with wet; but the rain had ceased, though the sky was still dark; and the hopeful birds were singing cheerfully. As I walked to and fro in the garden, and the twilight began to close around me, their little voices were hushed; and that peculiar silence which belongs to such an evening in the country when the lightest trees are quite still, save for the occasional droppings from their boughs, prevailed.

There was a little green perspective of trellis-work and ivy at the side of our cottage, through which I could see, from the garden where I was walking, into the road before the house. I happened to turn my eyes towards this place, as I was think-

ing of many things; and I saw a figure beyond, dressed in a plain cloak. It was bending eagerly towards me, and beckoning.

"Martha!" said I, going to it.

"Can you come with me?" she inquired in an agitated whisper. "I have been to him, and he is not at home. I wrote down where he was to come, and left it on his table with my own hand. They said he would not be out long. I have tidings for him. Can you come directly?"

My answer was to pass out at the gate immediately. She made a hasty gesture with her hand, as if to entreat my patience and my silence, and turned towards London, whence, as her dress betokened, she had come expeditiously on foot.

I asked her if that were not our destination? On her motioning Yes, with the same hasty gesture as before, I stopped an empty coach that was coming by, and we got into it. When I asked her where the coachman was to drive, she answered, "Anywhere near Golden Square! And quick!" — then shrunk into a corner, with one trembling hand before her face, and the other making the former gesture, as if she could not bear a voice.

Now much disturbed, and dazzled with conflicting gleams of hope and dread, I looked at her for some explanation. But, seeing how strongly she desired to remain quiet, and feeling that it was my own natural inclination too, at such a time, I did not attempt to break the silence. We proceeded without a word being spoken. Sometimes she glanced out of the window, as though she thought we were going slowly, though indeed we were going fast; but otherwise remained exactly as at first.

We alighted at one of the entrances to the square she had mentioned, where I directed the coach to wait, not knowing but that we might have some occasion for it. She laid her hand on my arm, and hurried me on to one of the sombre streets, of which there are several in that part, where the houses were once fair dwellings in the occupation of single families, but have, and had, long degenerated into poor lodgings let off in rooms. Entering at the open door of one of these, and releasing my arm, she beckoned me to follow her up the common staircase, which was like a tributary channel to the street.

The house swarmed with inmates. As we went up, doors of rooms were opened and people's heads put out; and we passed other people on the stairs, who were coming down. In glancing up from the outside, before we entered, I had seen women and children lolling at the windows over flower-pots; and we seemed to have attracted their curiosity, for these were principally the observers who looked out of their doors. It was a broad panelled staircase, with massive balustrades of some dark wood; cornices above the doors, ornamented with carved fruit and flowers; and broad seats in the windows. But all these tokens of past grandeur were miserably decayed and dirty; rot, damp, and age had weakened the flooring, which in many places was unsound, and even unsafe. Some attempts had been made, I noticed, to infuse new blood into this dwindling frame, by repairing the costly old woodwork here and there with common deal; but it was like the marriage of a reduced old noble to a plebeian pauper, and each party to the ill-assorted union shrunk away from the other. Several of the back-windows on

the staircase had been darkened or wholly blocked up. In those that remained there was scarcely any glass; and, through the crumbling frames by which the bad air seemed always to come in, and never to go out, I saw, through other glassless windows, into other houses in a similar condition, and looked giddily down into a wretched yard, which was the common dust-heap of the mansion.

We proceeded to the top story of the house. Two or three times, by the way, I thought I observed, in the indistinct light, the skirts of a female figure going up before us. As we turned to ascend the last flight of stairs between us and the roof, we caught a full view of this figure pausing for a moment at a door. Then it turned the handle, and went in.

"What's this?" said Martha in a whisper. "She has gone into my room. I don't know her."

I knew her. I had recognized her, with amazement, for Miss Dartle.

I said something to the effect that it was a lady whom I had seen before, in a few words, to my conductress; and had scarcely done so when we heard her voice in the room, though not, from where we stood, what she was saying. Martha, with an astonished look, repeated her former action, and softly led me up the stairs: and then, by a little back-door which seemed to have no lock, and which she pushed open with a touch, into a small empty garret with a low sloping roof: little better than a cupboard. Between this, and the room she had called hers, there was a small door of communication, standing partly open. Here we stopped, breathless with our ascent, and she placed her hand lightly on my lips.

I could only see, of the room beyond, that it was pretty large; that there was a bed in it; and that there were some common pictures of ships upon the walls. I could not see Miss Dartle, or the person whom we had heard her address. Certainly my companion could not, for my position was the best.

A dead silence prevailed for some moments. Martha kept one hand on my lips, and raised the other in a listening attitude.

"It matters little to me her not being at home," said Rosa Dartle haughtily; "I know nothing of her. It is you I come to see."

"Me?" replied a soft voice.

At the sound of it, a thrill went through my frame. For it was Emily's!

"Yes," returned Miss Dartle, "I have come to look at you. What! You are not ashamed of the face that has done so much?"

The resolute and unrelenting hatred of her tone, its cold stern sharpness, and its mastered rage, presented her before me as if I had seen her standing in the light. I saw the flashing black eyes, and the passion-wasted figure; and I saw the scar, with its white track cutting through her lips, quivering and throbbing as she spoke.

"I have come to see," she said, "James Steerforth's fancy; the girl who ran away with him, and is the town talk of the commonest people of her native place; the bold, flaunting, practised companion of persons like James Steerforth. I want to know what such a thing is like."

There was a rustle, as if the unhappy girl, on whom she heaped these taunts, ran towards the

door, and the speaker swiftly interposed herself before it. It was succeeded by a moment's pause.

When Miss Dartle spoke again, it was through her set teeth, and with a stamp upon the ground.

"Stay there!" she said, "or I'll proclaim you to the house, and the whole street! If you try to evade *me*, I'll stop you, if it's by the hair, and raise the very stones against you!"

A frightened murmur was the only reply that reached my ears. A silence succeeded. I did not know what to do. Much as I desired to put an end to the interview, I felt that I had no right to present myself; that it was for Mr. Peggotty alone to see her and recover her. Would he never come? I thought impatiently.

"So!" said Rosa Dartle with a contemptuous laugh, "I see her at last! Why, he was a poor creature to be taken by that delicate mock modesty, and that hanging head!"

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, spare me!" exclaimed Emily. "Whoever you are, you know my pitiable story, and for Heaven's sake spare me, if you would be spared yourself!"

"If *I* would be spared!" returned the other fiercely; "what is there in common between *us*, do you think?"

"Nothing but our sex," said Emily with a burst of tears.

"And that," said Rosa Dartle, "is so strong a claim, preferred by one so infamous, that if I had any feeling in my breast but scorn and abhorrence of you, it would freeze it up. Our sex! You are an honor to our sex!"

"I have deserved this," cried Emily, "but it's

dreadful! Dear, dear lady, think what I have suffered, and how I am fallen! Oh, Martha, come back! Oh, home, home!"

Miss Dartle placed herself in a chair, within view of the door, and looked downward, as if Emily were crouching on the floor before her. Being now between me and the light, I could see her curled lip, and her cruel eyes intently fixed on one place, with a greedy triumph.

"Listen to what I say," she said; "and reserve your false arts for your dupes. Do you hope to move *me* by your tears? No more than you could charm me by your smiles, you purchased slave!"

"Oh, have some merey on me!" cried Emily. "Show me some compassion, or I shall die mad!"

"It would be no great penance," said Rosa Dartle, "for your crimes. Do you know what you have done? Do you ever think of the home you have laid waste?"

"Oh! is there ever night or day when I don't think of it?" cried Emily; and now I could just see her, on her knees, with her head thrown back, her pale face looking upward, her hands wildly clasped and held out, and her hair streaming about her. "Has there ever been a single minute, waking or sleeping, when it hasn't been before me, just as it used to be in the lost days when I turned my back upon it forever and forever? Oh, home, home! Oh, dear, dear uncle, if you ever could have known the agony your love would cause me when I fell away from good, you never would have shown it to me so constant, much as you felt it; but would have been angry to me, at least once in my life, that I might have had some comfort! I have none, none,

no comfort upon earth, for all of them were always fond of me!" She dropped on her face, before the imperious figure in the chair, with an imploring effort to clasp the skirt of her dress.

Rosa Dartle sat looking down upon her, as inflexible as a figure of brass. Her lips were tightly compressed, as if she knew that she must keep a strong constraint upon herself—I write what I sincerely believe—or she would be tempted to strike the beautiful form with her foot. I saw her distinctly, and the whole power of her face and character seemed forced into that expression. Would he never come?

"The miserable vanity of these earth-worms!" she said, when she had so far controlled the angry heavings of her breast that she could trust herself to speak. "*Your* home! Do you imagine that I bestow a thought on it, or suppose you could do any harm to that low place, which money would not pay for, and handsomely? *Your* home! You were a part of the trade of your home, and were bought and sold like any other vendible thing your people dealt in."

"Oh, not that!" cried Emily. "Say anything of me; but don't visit my disgrace and shame, more than I have done, on folks who are as honorable as you! Have some respect for them, as you are a lady, if you have no mercy for me."

"I speak," she said, not deigning to take any heed of this appeal, and drawing away her dress from the contamination of Emily's touch, "I speak of *his* home—where I live. Here," she said, stretching out her hand with her contemptuous laugh, and looking down upon the prostrate girl, "is a worthy

cause of division between lady-mother and gentleman-son; of grief in a house where she wouldn't have been admitted as a kitchen-girl; of anger, and repining, and reproach. This piece of pollution, picked up from the water-side, to be made much of for an hour, and then tossed back to her original place!"

"No, no!" cried Emily, clasping her hands together. "When he first came into my way—that the day had never dawned upon me, and he had met me being carried to my grave!—I had been brought up as virtuous as you or any lady, and was going to be the wife of as good a man as you or any lady in the world can ever marry. If you live in his home and know him, you know, perhaps, what his power with a weak, vain girl might be. I don't defend myself, but I know well, and he knows well, or he will know when he comes to die, and his mind is troubled with it, that he used all his power to deceive me, and that I believed him, trusted him, and loved him!"

Rosa Dartle sprang up from her seat; recoiled; and in recoiling struck at her, with a face of such malignity, so darkened and disfigured by passion, that I had almost thrown myself between them. The blow, which had no aim, fell upon the air. As she now stood panting, looking at her with the utmost detestation that she was capable of expressing, and trembling from head to foot with rage and scorn, I thought I had never seen such a sight, and never could see such another.

"*You* love him! *You!*" she cried, with her clenched hand quivering as if it only wanted a weapon to stab the object of her wrath.

Emily had shrunk out of my view. There was no reply.

"And tell that to *me*," she added, "with your shameful lips? Why don't they whip these creatures? If I could order it to be done, I would have this girl whipped to death."

And so she would, I have no doubt. I would not have trusted her with the rack itself, while that furious look lasted.

She slowly, very slowly, broke into a laugh, and pointed at Emily with her hand, as if she were a sight of shame for gods and men.

"*She* love!" she said. "That carrion! And he ever cared for her, she'd tell me? Ha, ha! The liars that these traders are!"

Her mockery was worse than her undisguised rage. Of the two, I would have much preferred to be the object of the latter. But, when she suffered it to break loose, it was only for a moment. She had chained it up again, and, however it might tear her within, she subdued it to herself.

"I came here, you pure fountain of love," she said, "to see—as I began by telling you—what such a thing as you was like. I was curious. I am satisfied. Also to tell you that you had best seek that home of yours with all speed, and hide your head among those excellent people who are expecting you, and whom your money will console. When it's all gone, you can believe, and trust, and love again, you know! I thought you a broken toy that had lasted its time; a worthless spangle that was tarnished, and thrown away. But, finding you true gold, a very lady, and an ill-used innocent, with a fresh heart full of love and trustfulness, which you look

like, and is quite consistent with your story! — I have something more to say. Attend to it; for what I say, I'll do. Do you hear me, you fairy spirit? What I say, I mean to do!"

Her rage got the better of her again for a moment; but it passed over her face like a spasm, and left her smiling.

"Hide yourself," she pursued, "if not at home, somewhere. Let it be somewhere beyond reach; in some obscure life — or, better still, in some obscure death. I wonder, if your loving heart will not break, you have found no way of helping it to be still! I have heard of such means sometimes. I believe they may be easily found."

A low crying on the part of Emily interrupted her here. She stopped, and listened to it as if it were music.

"I am of a strange nature, perhaps," Rosa Dartle went on; "but I can't breathe freely in the air you breathe. I find it sickly. Therefore, I will have it cleared; I will have it purified of you. If you live here to-morrow, I'll have your story and your character proclaimed on the common stair. There are decent women in the house, I am told; and it is a pity such a light as you should be among them, and concealed. If, leaving here, you seek any refuge in this town in any character but your true one (which you are welcome to bear, without molestation from me), the same service shall be done you, if I hear of your retreat. Being assisted by a gentleman who not long ago aspired to the favor of your hand, I am sanguine as to that."

Would he never, never come? How long was I to bear this? How long could I bear it?

"Oh me, oh me!" exclaimed the wretched Emily, in a tone that might have touched the hardest heart, I should have thought; but there was no relenting in Rosa Dartle's smile. "What, what shall I do?"

"Do!" returned the other. "Live happy in your own reflections! Consecrate your existence to the recollection of James Steerforth's tenderness—he would have made you his serving-man's wife, would he not?—or to feeling grateful to the upright and deserving creature who would have taken you as his gift. Or, if those proud remembrances, and the consciousness of your own virtues, and the honorable position to which they have raised you in the eyes of everything that wears the human shape, will not sustain you, marry that good man, and be happy in his condescension. If this will not do either, die! There are doorways and dust-heaps for such deaths, and such despair—find one, and take your flight to Heaven!"

I heard a distant foot upon the stairs. I knew it, I was certain. It was his, thank God!

She moved slowly from before the door when she said this, and passed out of my sight.

"But mark!" she added, slowly and sternly, opening the other door to go away, "I am resolved, for reasons that I have and hatreds that I entertain, to cast you out, unless you withdraw from my reach altogether, or drop your pretty mask. This is what I had to say, and what I say, I mean to do!"

The foot upon the stairs came nearer—nearer—passed her as she went down—rushed into the room!

"Uncle!"

A fearful cry followed the word. I paused a mo-



ment, and, looking in, saw him supporting her insensible figure in his arms. He gazed for a few seconds in the face; then stooped to kiss it—oh, how tenderly!—and drew a handkerchief before it.

“Mas’r Davy,” he said, in a low, tremulous voice, when it was covered, “I thank my Heav’nly Father as my dream’s come true! I thank Him hearty for having guided of me, in His own ways, to my darling!”

With those words he took her up in his arms; and, with the veiled face lying on his bosom, and addressed towards his own, carried her, motionless and unconscious, down the stairs.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BEGINNING OF A LONGER JOURNEY.

It was yet early in the morning of the following day, when, as I was walking in my garden with my aunt (who took little other exercise now, being so much in attendance on my dear Dora), I was told that Mr. Peggotty desired to speak with me. He came into the garden to meet me half-way, on my going towards the gate; and bared his head, as it was always his custom to do, when he saw my aunt, for whom he had a high respect. I had been telling her all that had happened over-night. Without saying a word, she walked up with a cordial face, shook hands with him, and patted him on the arm. It was so expressively done, that she had no need to say a word. Mr. Peggotty understood her quite as well as if she had said a thousand.

"I'll go in now, Trot," said my aunt, "and look after Little Blossom, who will be getting up presently."

"Not along of my being heer, ma'am, I hope?" said Mr. Peggotty. "Unless my wits is gone a bahd's neezing"—by which Mr. Peggotty meant to say bird's-nesting—"this morning, 'tis along of me as you're a-going to quit us?"

"You have something to say, my good friend," returned my aunt, "and will do better without me."

"By your leave, ma'am," returned Mr. Peggotty, "I should take it kind, pervising you doesn't mind my clicketen, if you'd bide heer."

"Would you?" said my aunt with short good nature. "Then I am sure I will!"

So, she drew her arm through Mr. Peggotty's, and walked with him to a leafy little summer-house there was at the bottom of the garden, where she sat down on a bench, and I beside her. There was a seat for Mr. Peggotty, too, but he preferred to stand, leaning his hand on the small rustie table. As he stood, looking at his cap for a little while before beginning to speak, I could not help observing what power and force of character his sinewy hand expressed, and what a good and trusty companion it was to his honest brow and iron-gray hair.

"I took my dear child away last night," Mr. Peggotty began, as he raised his eyes to ours, "to my lodging, wheer I have a long time been expecting of her and preparing for her. It was hours afore she knowed me right; and when she did, she kneeled down at my feet, and keinder said to me, as if it was her prayers, how it all come to be. You may believe me, when I heerd her voice, as I had heerd at home so playful—and see her humbled, as it might be, in the dust our Saviour wrote in with his blessed hand—I felt a wovnd go to my art, in the midst of all its thankfulness."

He drew his sleeve across his face, without any pretence of concealing why; and then cleared his voice.

"It warn't for long as I felt that; for she was

found. I had on'y to think as she was found, and it was gone. I doesn't know why I do so much as mention of it now, I'm sure. I didn't have it in my mind, a minute ago, to say a word about myself; but it come up so nat'ral, that I yielded to it afore I was aweer."

"You are a self-denying soul," said my aunt, "and will have your reward."

Mr. Peggotty, with the shadows of the leaves playing athwart his face, made a surprised inclination of the head towards my aunt, as an acknowledgment of her good opinion; then, took up the thread he had relinquished.

"When my Em'ly took flight," he said, in stern wrath for the moment, "from the house wheer she was made a pris'ner by that theer spotted snake as Mas'r Davy see — and his story's trew, and may God confound him! — she took flight in the night. It was a dark night, with a many stars a shining. She was wild. She ran along the sea-beach, believing the old boat was theer; and calling out to us to turn away our faces, for she was a-coming by. She heerd herself a crying out, like as if it was another person; and cut herself on them sharp-pinted stones and rocks, and felt it no more than if she had been rock herself. Ever so fur she run, and there was fire afore her eyes and roarings in her ears. Of a sudden — or so she thowt, you understand — the day broke, wet and windy, and she was lying b'low a heap of stone upon the shore, and a woman was a speaking to her, saying, in the language of that country, what was it as had gone so much amiss?"

He saw everything he related. It passed before him, as he spoke, so vividly, that, in the intensity of

his earnestness, he presented what he described to me, with greater distinctness than I can express. I can hardly believe, writing now, long afterwards, but that I was actually present in these scenes; they are impressed upon me with such an astonishing air of fidelity.

"As Em'ly's eyes — which was heavy — see this woman better," Mr. Peggotty went on, "she knowed as she was one of them as she had often talked to on the beach. Fur, though she had run (as I have said) ever so fur in the night, she had oftentimes wandered long ways, partly afoot, partly in boats and carriages, and knowed all that country, 'long the coast, miles and miles. She hadn't no children of her own, this woman, being a young wife; but she was a looking to have one afore long. And may my prayers go up to Heaven that 'twill be a happiness to her, and a comfort, and a honor, all her life! May it love her, and be dootiful to her, in her old age; helpful of her at the last; a Angel to her heer, and heerafter!"

"Amen!" said my aunt.

"She had been summat timorous and down," said Mr. Peggotty, "and had sat, at first, a little way off, at her spinning, or such work as it was, when Em'ly talked to the children. But Em'ly had took notice of her, and had gone and spoke to her; and, as the young woman was partial to the children herself, they had soon made friends. Sermuchser, that when Em'ly went that way, she always giv' Em'ly flowers. This was her as now asked what it was that had gone so much amiss. Em'ly told her, and she — took her home. She did indeed. She took her home," said Mr. Peggotty, covering his face.

He was more affected by this act of kindness than I had ever seen him affected by anything since the night she went away. My aunt and I did not attempt to disturb him.

"It was a little cottage, you may suppose," he said presently, "but she found space for Em'ly in it, — her husband was away at sea, — and she kep' it secret, and prevailed upon such neighbors as she had (they was not many near) to keep it secret too. Em'ly was took bad with fever, and what is very strange to me is, — maybe 'tis not so strange to scholars, — the language of that country went out of her head, and she could only speak her own, that no one unnerstood. She recollects, as if she had dreamed it, that she lay there, always a talking her own tongue, always believing as the old boat was round the next pint in the bay, and begging and imploring of 'em to send theer and tell how she was dying, and bring back a message of forgiveness, if it was on'y a wured. A'most the whole time she thowt, — now that him as I made mention on just now was lurking for her unnerneath the winder; now that him as had brought her to this was in the room, — and cried to the good young woman not to give her up, and knowed, at the same time, that she couldn't unnerstand, and dreaded that she must be took away. Likewise the fire was afore her eyes, and the roarings in her ears; and there was no to-day, nor yesterday, nor yet to-morrow; but everything in her life as ever had been, or as ever could be, and everything as never had been, and as never could be, was a crowding on her all at once, and nothing clear nor welcome, and yet she sang and laughed about it! How long this lasted I doen't know; but

then there come a sleep; and in that sleep, from being a many times stronger than her own self, she fell into the weakness of the littlest child."

Here he stopped, as if for relief from the terrors of his own description. After being silent for a few moments, he pursued his story.

"It was a pleasant arternoon when she awoke; and so quiet, that there warn't a sound but the rippling of that blue sea without a tide upon the shore. It was her belief, at first, that she was at home upon a Sunday morning; but, the vine-leaves as she see at the winder, and the hills beyond, warn't home, and contradicted of her. Then, come in her friend, to watch alongside of her bed; and then she knowed as the old boat warn't round that next pint in the bay no more, but was fur off; and knowed where she was, and why; and broke out a crying on that good young woman's bosom, wheer I hope her baby is a lying now, a cheering of her with its pretty eyes!"

He could not speak of this good friend of Emily's without a flow of tears. It was in vain to try. He broke down again, endeavoring to bless her!

"That done my Em'ly good," he resumed, after such emotion as I could not behold without sharing in; and as to my aunt, she wept with all her heart; "that done Em'ly good, and she begun to mend. But, the language of that country was quite gone from her, and she was forced to make signs. So she went on, getting better from day to day, slow, but sure, and trying to learn the names of common things — names as she seemed never to have heerd in all her life — till one evening come, when she was sitting at a window, looking at a little girl at

play upon the beach. And of a sudden this child held out her hand, and said, what would be in English, 'Fisherman's daughter, here's a shell!'—for you are to unnerstand that they used at first to call her 'Pretty lady,' as the general way in that country is, and that she had taught 'em to call her 'Fisherman's daughter' instead. The child says of a sudden, 'Fisherman's daughter, here's a shell!' Then Em'ly unnerstands her; and she answers, bursting out a crying; and it all comes back!

"When Em'ly got strong again," said Mr. Peggotty after another short interval of silence, "she cast about to leave that good young creetur, and get to her own country. The husband was come home, then; and the two together put her aboard a small trader bound to Leghorn, and from that to France. She had a little money, but it was less than little as they would take for all they done. I'm a'most glad on it, though they was so poor! What they done is laid up wheer neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and wheer thieves do not break through nor steal. Mas'r Davy, it'll outlast all the treasure in the wureld.

"Em'ly got to France, and took service to wait on travelling ladies at a inn in the port. Theer, theer come, one day, that snake.—Let him never come nigh me. I doen't know what hurt I might do him!—Soon as she see him, without him seeing her, all her fear and wildness returned upon her, and she fled afore the very breath he drawed. She come to England, and was set ashore at Dover.

"I doen't know," said Mr. Peggotty, "for sure, when her art begun to fail her; but all the way to England she had thowt to come to her dear home.

Soon as she got to England she turned her face tow'rds it. But, fear of not being forgiv, fear of being pinte'd at, fear of some of us being dead along of her, fear of many things, turned her from it, keinder by force, upon the road. 'Uncle, uncle,' she says to me, 'the fear of not being worthy to do, what my torn and bleeding breast so longed to do, was the most fright'ning fear of all! I turned back, when my art was full of prayers that I might crawl to the old doorstep, in the night, kiss it, lay my wicked face upon it, and theer be found dead in the morning.'

"She come," said Mr. Peggotty, dropping his voice to an awestricken whisper, "to London. She — as had never seen it in her life — alone — without a penny — young — so pretty — come to London. A'most the moment as she lighted heer, all so desolate, she found (as she believed) a friend; a decent woman as spoke to her about the needlework as she had been brought up to do, about finding plenty of it for her, about a lodging for the night, and making seeret inquisition concerning of me and all at home. to-morrow. When my child," he said aloud, and with an energy of gratitude that shook him from head to foot. "stood upon the brink of more than I can say or think on — Martha, trew to her promise, saved her!"

I could not repress a cry of joy.

"Mas'r Davy!" he said, griping my hand in that strong hand of his, "it was you as first made mention of her to me. I thankee, sir! She was arnest. She had knowed of her bitter knowledge wheer to watch and what to do. She had done it. And the Lord was above all! She come, white and hurried,

upon Em'ly in her sleep. She says to her, 'Rise up from worse than death, and come with me!' Them belonging to the house would have stopped her, but they might as soon have stopped the sea. 'Stand away from me,' she says; 'I am a ghost that calls her from beside her open grave!' She told Em'ly she had seen me, and knowed I loved her, and forgiv her. She wrapped her, hasty, in her clothes. She took her, faint and trembling, on her arm. She heeded no more what they said than if she had had no ears. She walked among 'em with my child, mind-ing only her; and brought her safe out, in the dead of night, from that black pit of ruin!

"She attended on Em'ly," said Mr. Peggotty, who had released my hand, and put his own hand on his heaving chest; "she attended to my Em'ly, lying wearied out, and wandering betwixt whiles, till late next day. Then she went in search of me; then in search of you, Mas'r Davy. She didn't tell Em'ly what she come out fur, lest her art should fail, and she should think of hiding of herself. How the cruel lady knowed of her being theer, I can't say. Whether him as I have spoke so much of chanced to see 'em going theer, or whether (which is most like, to my thinking) he had heerd it from the woman, I doesn't greatly ask myself. My niece is found.

"All night long," said Mr. Peggotty, "we have been together, Em'ly and me. 'Tis little (considering the time) as she has said, in wureds, through them broken-hearted tears; 'tis less as I have seen of her dear face, as growed into a woman's at my hearth. But, all night long, her arms has been about my neck; and her head was laid heer; and

we knows full well as we can put our trust in one another evermore."

He ceased to speak, and his hand upon the table rested there in perfect repose, with a resolution in it that might have conquered lions.

"It was a gleam of light upon me, Trot," said my aunt, drying her eyes, "when I formed the resolution of being godmother to your sister, Betsey Trotwood, who disappointed me; but, next to that, hardly anything would have given me greater pleasure than to be godmother to that good young creature's baby!"

Mr. Peggotty nodded his understanding of my aunt's feelings, but could not trust himself with any verbal reference to the subject of her commendation. We all remained silent, and occupied with our own reflections (my aunt drying her eyes, and now sobbing convulsively, and now laughing and calling herself a fool), until I spoke.

"You have quite made up your mind," said I to Mr. Peggotty, "as to the future, good friend? I need scarcely ask you."

"Quite, Mas'r Davy," he returned; "and told Em'ly. Theer's mighty countries, fur from heer. Our future life lays over the sea."

"They will emigrate together, aunt," said I.

"Yes!" said Mr. Peggotty with a hopeful smile. "No one can't reproach my darling in Australia. We will begin a new life over theer!"

I asked him if he yet proposed to himself any time for going away.

"I was down at the docks early this morning, sir," he returned, "to get information concerning of them ships. In about six weeks or two months

from now, there'll be one sailing—I see her this morning—went aboard—and we shall take our passage in her.”

“Quite alone?” I asked.

“Ay, Mas'r Davy!” he returned. “My sister, you see, she's that fond of you and yourn, and that accustomed to think on'y of her own country, that it wouldn't be hardly fair to let her go. Besides which, theer's one she has in charge, Mas'r Davy, as doesn't ought to be forgot.”

“Poor Ham!” said I.

“My good sister takes care of his house, you see, ma'am, and he takes kindly to her,” Mr. Peggotty explained for my aunt's better information. “He'll set and talk to her, with a calm spirit, wen it's like he couldn't bring himself to open his lips to another. Poor fellow!” said Mr. Peggotty, shaking his head, “theer's not so much left him, that he could spare the little as he has!”

“And Mrs. Gummidge?” said I.

“Well, I've had a mort of con-sideration, I do tell you,” returned Mr. Peggotty, with a perplexed look which gradually cleared as he went on, “concerning of Missis Gummidge. You see, wen Missis Gummidge falls a thinking of the old 'un, she ain't what you may call good company. Betwixt you and me, Mas'r Davy—and you, ma'am—wen Missis Gummidge takes to wimicking,”—our old county word for crying,—“she's liable to be considered to be, by them as didn't know the old 'un, peevish-like. Now, I *did* know the old 'un,” said Mr. Peggotty, “and I knowed his merits, so I unnerstan' her; but 'tain't entirely so, you see, with others—nat'rally can't be!”

My aunt and I both acquiesced.

"Wheerby," said Mr. Peggotty, "my sister might—I doesn't say she would, but might—find Missis Gummidge give her a leetle trouble now and again. Theerfur 'tain't my intentions to moor Missis Gummidge 'long with them, but to find a Beein fur her wheer she can fisherate fur herself." (A Beein signifies, in that dialect, a home, and to fisherate is to provide.) "Fur which purpose," said Mr. Peggotty, "I means to make her a 'lowance afore I go, as'll leave her pretty comfort'ble. She's the faithfulest of creeturs. 'Tain't to be expected, of course, at her time of life, and being lone and lorn, as the good old mawther^s is to be knocked about aboard-ship, and in the woods and wilds of a new and fur-away country. So that's what I'm a-going to do with *her*."

He forgot nobody. He thought of everybody's claims and strivings but his own.

"Em'ly," he continued, "will keep along with me—poor child, she is sore in need of peace and rest!—until such time as we goes upon our voyage. She'll work at them clothes as must be made; and I hope her troubles will begin to seem longer ago than they was, wen she finds herself once more by her rough but loving uncle."

My aunt nodded confirmation of this hope, and imparted great satisfaction to Mr. Peggotty.

"Theer's one thing funder, Mas'r Davy," said he, putting his hand in his breast-pocket, and gravely taking out the little paper bundle I had seen before, which he unrolled on the table. "Theer's these heer bank notes—fifty pound, and ten. To them I wish to add the money as she come away with.

I've asked her about that (but not saying why), and have added of it up. I ain't a scholar. Would you be so kind as see how 'tis?"

He handed me, apologetically for his scholarship, a piece of paper, and observed me while I looked it over. It was quite right.

"Thankee, sir," he said, taking it back. "This money, if you doesn't see objections, Mas'r Davy, I shall put up, jest afore I go, in a cover d'rected to him; and put that up in another, d'rected to his mother. I shall tell her, in no more wureds than I speak to you, what it's the price on; and that I'm gone, and past receiving of it back."

I told him that I thought it would be right to do so—that I was thoroughly convinced it would be, since he felt it to be right.

"I said that theer was on'y one thing furdur," he proceeded with a grave smile, when he had made up his little bundle again, and put it in his pocket; "but theer was too. I warn't sure in my mind, wen I come out this morning, as I could go and break to Ham, of my own self, what had so thankfully happened. So I writ a letter while I was out, and put it in the post-office, telling of 'em how all was as 'tis; and that I should come down to-morrow to unload my mind of what little needs a doing of down theer, and, most-like, take my farewell leave of Yarmouth."

"And do you wish me to go with you?" said I, seeing that he left something unsaid.

"If you could do me that kind favor, Mas'r Davy," he replied, "I know the sight on you would cheer 'em up a bit."

My little Dora being in good spirits, and very

desirous that I should go—as I found on talking it over with her—I readily pledged myself to accompany him in accordance with his wish. Next morning, consequently, we were on the Yarmouth coach, and again travelling over the old ground.

As we passed along the familiar street at night—Mr. Peggotty, in spite of all my remonstrances, carrying my bag—I glanced into Omer and Joram's shop, and saw my old friend Mr. Omer there, smoking his pipe. I felt reluctant to be present when Mr. Peggotty first met his sister and Ham; and made Mr. Omer my excuse for lingering behind.

"How is Mr. Omer after this long time?" said I, going in.

He fanned away the smoke of his pipe, that he might get a better view of me, and soon recognized me with great delight.

"I should get up, sir, to acknowledge such an honor as this visit," said he, "only my limbs are rather out of sorts, and I am wheeled about. With the exception of my limbs and my breath, howsoever, I am as hearty as a man can be, I'm thankful to say."

I congratulated him on his contented looks and his good spirits, and saw, now, that his easy-chair went on wheels.

"It's an ingenious thing, ain't it?" he inquired, following the direction of my glance, and polishing the elbow with his arm. "It runs as light as a feather, and tracks as true as a mail-coach. Bless you, my little Minnie—my granddaughter, you know, Minnie's child—puts her little strength against the back, gives it a shove, and away we go, as clever and merry as ever you see anything! And

I tell you what—it's a most uncommon chair to smoke a pipe in."

I never saw such a good old fellow to make the best of a thing, and find out the enjoyment of it, as Mr. Omer. He was as radiant as if his chair, his asthma, and the failure of his limbs, were the various branches of a great invention for enhancing the luxury of a pipe.

"I see more of the world, I can assure you," said Mr. Omer, "in this chair, than ever I see out of it. You'd be surprised at the number of people that looks in of a day to have a chat. You really would! There's twice as much in the newspaper, since I've taken to this chair, as there used to be. As to general reading, dear me, what a lot of it I do get through! That's what I feel so strong, you know! If it had been my eyes, what should I have done? If it had been my ears, what should I have done? Being my limbs, what does it signify? Why, my limbs only made my breath shorter when I used 'em. And now, if I want to go out into the street or down to the sands, I've only got to call Dick, Joram's youngest 'prentice, and away I go in my own carriage, like the Lord Mayor of London."

He half suffocated himself with laughing here.

"Lord bless you!" said Mr. Omer, resuming his pipe, "a man must take the fat with the lean; that's what he must make up his mind to in this life. Joram does a fine business. Excellent business."

"I am very glad to hear it," said I.

"I knew you would be," said Mr. Omer. "And Joram and Minnie are like valentines. What more can a man expect? What's his limbs to *that*?"

His supreme contempt for his own limbs, as he

sat smoking, was one of the pleasantest oddities I have ever encountered.

"And since I've took to general reading, you've took to general writing, eh, sir?" said Mr. Omer, surveying me admiringly. "What a lovely work that was of yours! What expressions in it! I read it every word—every word. And as to feeling sleepy! Not at all!"

I laughingly expressed my satisfaction, but I must confess that I thought this association of ideas significant.

"I give you my word and honor, sir," said Mr. Omer, "that when I lay that book upon the table, and look at it outside; compact in three separate and individual wollumes—one, two, three; I am as proud as Punch to think that I once had the honor of being connected with your family. And dear me, it's a long time ago, now, ain't it? Over at Blunderstone. With a pretty little party laid along with the other party. And you quite a small party, then, yourself. Dear, dear!"

I changed the subject by referring to Emily. After assuring him that I did not forget how interested he had always been in her, and how kindly he had always treated her, I gave him a general account of her restoration to her uncle by the aid of Martha; which I knew would please the old man. He listened with the utmost attention, and said, feelingly, when I had done,—

"I am rejoiced at it, sir! It's the best news I have heard for many a day. Dear, dear, dear! And what's going to be undertook for that unfortunate young woman, Martha, now?"

"You touch a point that my thoughts have been

dwelling on since yesterday," said I, "but on which I can give you no information yet, Mr. Omer. Mr. Peggotty has not alluded to it, and I have a delicacy in doing so. I am sure he has not forgotten it. He forgets nothing that is disinterested and good."

"Because, you know," said Mr. Omer, taking himself up where he had left off, "whatever *is* done, I should wish to be a member of. Put me down for anything you may consider right, and let me know. I never could think the girl all bad, and I am glad to find she's not. So will my daughter Minnie be. Young women are contradictory creatures in some things — her mother was just the same as her — but their hearts are soft and kind. It's all show with Minnie about Martha. Why she should consider it necessary to make any show, I don't undertake to tell you. But it's all show, bless you. She'd do her any kindness in private. So, put me down for whatever you may consider right, will you be so good? and drop me a line where to forward it. Dear me!" said Mr. Omer, "when a man is drawing on to a time of life where the two ends of life meet; when he finds himself, however hearty he is, being wheeled about for the second time, in a speeches of go-cart; he should be over-rejoiced to do a kindness if he can. He wants plenty. And I don't speak of myself, particular," said Mr. Omer, "because, sir, the way I look at it is, that we are all drawing on to the bottom of the hill, whatever age we are, on account of time never standing still for a single moment. So let us always do a kindness, and be over-rejoiced. To be sure!"

He knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and put it on a ledge in the back of his chair, expressly made for its reception.

"There's Em'ly's cousin, him that she was to have been married to," said Mr. Omer, rubbing his hands feebly, "as fine a fellow as there is in Yarmouth! He'll come and talk or read to me, in the evening, for an hour together sometimes. That's a kindness, I should call it. All his life's a kindness."

"I am going to see him now," said I.

"Are you?" said Mr. Omer. "Tell him I was hearty, and sent my respects. Minnie and Joram's at a ball. They would be as proud to see you as I am, if they was at home. Minnie won't hardly go out at all, you see, 'on account of father,' as she says. So I swore to-night, that if she didn't go, I'd go to bed at six. In consequence of which," Mr. Omer shook himself and his chair with laughter at the success of his device, "she and Joram's at a ball."

I shook hands with him and wished him good-night.

"Half a minute, sir," said Mr. Omer. "If you was to go without seeing my little elephant, you'd lose the best of sights. You never see such a sight! Minnie!"

A musical little voice answered, from somewhere upstairs, "I am coming, grandfather!" and a pretty little girl with long, flaxen, curling hair soon came running into the shop.

"This is my little elephant, sir," said Mr. Omer, fondling the child. "Siamese breed, sir. Now, little elephant!"

The little elephant set the door of the parlor open, enabling me to see that, in these latter days, it was converted into a bedroom for Mr. Omer, who could not be easily conveyed upstairs; and then hid

her pretty forehead, and tumbled her long hair, against the back of Mr. Omer's chair.

"The elephant butts, you know, sir," said Mr. Omer, winking, "when he goes at a object. Once, elephant. Twice. Three times!"

At this signal, the little elephant, with a dexterity that was next to marvellous in so small an animal, whisked the chair round with Mr. Omer in it, and rattled it off, pell-mell, into the parlor, without touching the door-post: Mr. Omer indescribably enjoying the performance, and looking back at me on the road as if it were the triumphant issue of his life's exertions.

After a stroll about the town, I went to Ham's house. Peggotty had now removed here for good; and had let her own house to the successor of Mr. Barkis in the carrying business, who had paid her very well for the good will, cart, and horse. I believe the very same slow horse that Mr. Barkis drove was still at work.

I found them in the neat kitchen, accompanied by Mrs. Gummidge, who had been fetched from the old boat by Mr. Peggotty himself. I doubt if she could have been induced to desert her post by any one else. He had evidently told them all. Both Peggotty and Mrs. Gummidge had their aprons to their eyes, and Ham had just stepped out "to take a turn on the beach." He presently came home, very glad to see me; and I hope they were all the better for my being there. We spoke, with some approach to cheerfulness, of Mr. Peggotty's growing rich in a new country, and of the wonders he would describe in his letters. We said nothing of Emily by name, but distantly referred to her more than once. Ham was the serenest of the party.

But Peggotty told me, when she lighted me to a little chamber where the crocodile book was lying ready for me on the table, that he always was the same. She believed (she told me, crying) that he was broken-hearted: though he was as full of courage as of sweetness, and worked harder and better than any boat-builder in any yard in all that part. There were times, she said, of an evening, when he talked of their old life in the boat-house; and then he mentioned Emily as a child. But, he never mentioned her as a woman.

I thought I had read in his face that he would like to speak to me alone. I therefore resolved to put myself in his way next evening, as he came home from his work. Having settled this with myself, I fell asleep. That night, for the first time in all those many nights, the candle was taken out of the window, Mr. Peggotty swung in his old hammock in the old boat, and the wind murmured with the old sound round his head.

All next day he was occupied in disposing of his fishing-boat and tackle; in packing up, and sending to London by wagon, such of his little domestic possessions as he thought would be useful to him; and in parting with the rest, or bestowing them on Mrs. Gummidge. She was with him all day. As I had a sorrowful wish to see the old place once more before it was locked up, I engaged to meet them there in the evening. But I so arranged it as that I should meet Ham first.

It was easy to come in his way, as I knew where he worked. I met him at a retired part of the sands which I knew he would cross, and turned back with him, that he might have leisure to speak to me if

he really wished. I had not mistaken the expression of his face. We had walked but a little way together, when he said, without looking at me, —

“Mas’r Davy, have you seen her?”

“Only for a moment, when she was in a swoon,” I softly answered.

We walked a little farther, and he said, —

“Mas’r Davy, shall you see her, d’ye think?”

“It would be too painful to her, perhaps,” said I.

“I have thowt of that,” he replied. “So ’twould, sir, so ’twould.”

“But Ham,” said I gently, “if there is anything that I could write to her, for you, in case I could not tell it; if there is anything you would wish to make known to her through me; I should consider it a sacred trust.”

“I am sure on’t. I thankee, sir, most kind! I think there is something I could wish said or wrote.”

“What is it?”

We walked a little farther in silence, and then he spoke.

“’Tain’t that I forgive her. ’Tain’t that so much. ’Tis more as I beg of her to forgive me for having pressed my affections upon her. Odd times, I think that if I hadn’t had her promise fur to marry me, sir, she was that trustful of me, in a friendly way, that she’d have told me what was struggling in her mind, and would have counselled with me, and I might have saved her.”

I pressed his hand. “Is that all?”

“There’s yet a something else,” he returned, “if I can say it, Mas’r Davy.”

We walked on, farther than we had walked yet,

before he spoke again. He was not crying when he made the pauses I shall express by lines. He was merely collecting himself to speak very plainly.

"I loved her — and I love the mem'ry of her — too deep — to be able to lead her to believe of my own self as I'm a happy man. I could only be happy by forgetting of her — and I'm afeard I couldn't hardly bear as she should be told I done that. But if you, being so full of learning, Mas'r Davy, could think of anything to say as might bring her to believe I wasn't greatly hurt: still loving of her, and mourning for her: anything as might bring her to believe as I was not tired of my life, and yet was hoping fur to see her without blame, wheer the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest — anything as would ease her sorrowful mind, and yet not make her think as I could ever marry, or as 'twas possible that any one could ever be to me what she was — I should ask of you to say that — with my prayers for her — that was so dear."

I pressed his manly hand again, and told him I would charge myself to do this as well as I could.

"I thankee, sir," he answered. "'Twas kind of you to meet me. 'Twas kind of you to bear him company down. Mas'r Davy, I unnerstan' very well, though my aunt will come to Lon'on afore they sail, and they'll unite once more, that I am not like to see him agen. I fare to feel sure on't. We doesn't say so, but so 'twill be, and better so. The last you see on him — the very last — will you give him the lovingest duty and thanks of the orphan, as he was ever more than a father to?"

This I also promised faithfully.

"I thankee again, sir," he said, heartily shaking hands. "I know wheer you're a-going. Good-by!"

With a slight wave of his hand, as though to explain to me that he could not enter the old place, he turned away. As I looked after his figure, crossing the waste in the moonlight, I saw him turn his face towards a strip of silvery light upon the sea, and pass on, looking at it, until he was a shadow in the distance.

The door of the boat-house stood open when I approached, and, on entering, I found it emptied of all its furniture, saving one of the old lockers, on which Mrs. Gummidge, with a basket on her knee, was seated, looking at Mr. Peggotty. He leaned his elbow on the rough chimney-piece, and gazed upon a few expiring embers in the grate; but he raised his head hopefully on my coming in, and spoke in a cheery manner.

"Come, according to promise, to bid farewell to 't, eh, Mas'r Davy?" he said, taking up the candle. "Bare enough now, ain't it?"

"Indeed, you have made good use of the time," said I.

"Why, we have not been idle, sir. Missis Gummidge has worked like a — I don't know what Missis Gummidge ain't worked like," said Mr. Peggotty, looking at her, at a loss for a sufficiently approving simile.

Mrs. Gummidge, leaning on her basket, made no observation.

"Theer's the very locker that you used to sit on, 'long with Em'ly!" said Mr. Peggotty in a whisper. "I'm a-going to carry it away with me, last of all.

And heer's your old little bedroom, see, Mas'r Davy ! A'most as bleak to-night as art could wish."

In truth, the wind, though it was low, had a solemn sound, and crept around the deserted house with a whispered wailing that was very mournful. Everything was gone, down to the little mirror with the oyster-shell frame. I thought of myself lying here, when that first great change was being wrought at home. I thought of the blue-eyed child who had enchanted me. I thought of Steerforth : and a foolish, fearful fancy came upon me of his being near at hand, and liable to be met at any turn.

"'Tis like to be long," said Mr. Peggotty in a low voice, "afore the boat finds new tenants. They look upon 't down heer as being unfort'nate now !"

"Does it belong to anybody in the neighborhood ?" I asked.

"To a mast-maker up town," said Mr. Peggotty. "I'm a-going to give the key to him to-night."

We looked into the other little room, and came back to Mrs. Gummidge, sitting on the locker, whom Mr. Peggotty, putting her light on the chimney-piece, requested to rise that he might carry it outside the door before extinguishing the candle.

"Dan'l," said Mrs. Gummidge, suddenly deserting her basket, and clinging to his arm, "my dear Dan'l, the parting words I speak in this house is, I mustn't be left behind. Doen't ye think of leaving me behind, Dan'l ! Oh, doe'n't ye ever do it !"

Mr. Peggotty, taken aback, looked from Mrs. Gummidge to me, and from me to Mrs. Gummidge, as if he had been awakened from a sleep.

"Doen't ye, dearest Dan'l, doen't ye !" cried Mrs. Gummidge fervently. "Take me 'long with you,

Dan'l, take me 'long with you and Em'ly! I'll be your servant, constant and trew. If there's slaves in them parts where you're a-going, I'll be bound to you for one, and happy, but doesn't ye leave me behind, Dan'l, that's a deary dear!"

"My good soul," said Mr. Peggotty, shaking his head, "you doesn't know what a long voyage, and what a hard life 'tis!"

"Yes, I do, Dan'l; I can guess," cried Mrs. Gummidge. "But my parting words under this roof is, I shall go into the house and die, if I am not took. I can dig, Dan'l. I can work. I can live hard. I can be loving and patient now—more than you think, Dan'l, if you'll only try me. I wouldn't touch the 'lowance, not if I was dying of want, Dan'l Peggotty; but I'll go with you and Em'ly, if you'll only let me, to the world's end! I know how 'tis; I know you think that I am lone and lorn; but, deary love, 'tain't so no more! I ain't sat here so long, a watching and a thinking of your trials, without some good being done me. Mas'r Davy, speak to him for me; I knows his ways and Em'ly's, and I knows their sorrows, and can be a comfort to 'em, some odd times, and labor for 'em allus! Dan'l, deary Dan'l, let me go 'long with you!"

And Mrs. Gummidge took his hand, and kissed it with a homely pathos and affection, in a homely rapture of devotion and gratitude, that he well deserved.

We brought the locker out, extinguished the candle, fastened the door on the outside, and left the old boat close shut up, a dark speck in the cloudy night. Next day, when we were returning to London outside the coach, Mrs. Gummidge and her basket were on the seat behind, and Mrs. Gummidge was happy.

CHAPTER XIII.

I ASSIST AT AN EXPLOSION.

WHEN the time Mr. Micawber had appointed so mysteriously was within four and twenty hours of being come, my aunt and I consulted how we should proceed, for my aunt was very unwilling to leave Dora. Ah! how easily I carried Dora up and down stairs now!

We were disposed, notwithstanding Mr. Micawber's stipulation for my aunt's attendance, to arrange that she should stay at home, and be represented by Mr. Dick and me. In short, we had resolved to take this course, when Dora again unsettled us by declaring that she never would forgive herself, and never would forgive her bad boy, if my aunt remained behind on any pretence.

"I won't speak to you," said Dora, shaking her curls at my aunt. "I'll be disagreeable! I'll make Jip bark at you all day. I shall be sure that you really are a cross old thing, if you don't go!"

"Tut, Blossom!" laughed my aunt. "You know you can't do without me!"

"Yes, I can," said Dora. "You are no use to me at all. You never run up and down stairs for me, all day long. You never sit and tell me stories

about Doady, when his shoes were worn out, and he was covered with dust — oh, what a poor little mite of a fellow! You never do anything at all to please me, do you, dear?" Dora made haste to kiss my aunt, and say, "Yes, you do! I'm only joking!" lest my aunt should think she really meant it.

"But, aunt," said Dora coaxingly, "now listen. You must go. I shall tease you till you let me have my own way about it. I shall lead my naughty boy *such* a life, if he don't make you go. I shall make myself *so* disagreeable — and so will Jip! You'll wish you had gone like a good thing, for ever and ever so long, if you don't go. Besides," said Dora, putting back her hair, and looking wonderingly at my aunt and me, "why shouldn't you both go? I am not very ill indeed. Am I?"

"Why, what a question!" cried my aunt.

"What a fancy!" said I.

"Yes! I know I am a silly little thing!" said Dora, slowly looking from one of us to the other, and then putting up her pretty lips to kiss us as she lay upon her couch. "Well then, you must both go, or I shall not believe you; and then I shall cry!"

I saw in my aunt's face that she began to give way now, and Dora brightened again as she saw it too.

"You'll come back with so much to tell me, that it'll take at least a week to make me understand!" said Dora. "Because I *know* I sha'n't understand, for a length of time, if there's any business in it. And there's sure to be some business in it! If there's anything to add up, besides, I don't know when I shall make it out: and my bad boy will look *so* miserable all the time. There! Now you'll go,

won't you? You'll only be gone one night, and Jip will take care of me while you are gone. Doady will carry me upstairs before you go, and I won't come down again till you come back; and you shall take Agnes a dreadfully scolding letter from me because she has never been to see us!"

We agreed, without any more consultation, that we would both go, and that Dora was a little impostor, who feigned to be rather unwell, because she liked to be petted. She was greatly pleased, and very merry; and we four—that is to say, my aunt, Mr. Dick, Traddles, and I—went down to Canterbury by the Dover mail that night.

At the hotel, where Mr. Micawber had requested us to await him, which we got into, with some trouble, in the middle of the night, I found a letter, importing that he would appear in the morning punctually at half-past nine. After which we went shivering, at that uncomfortable hour, to our respective beds, through various close passages: which smelt as if they had been steeped, for ages, in a solution of soup and stables.

Early in the morning I sauntered through the dear old tranquil streets, and again mingled with the shadows of the venerable gateways and churches. The rooks were sailing about the Cathedral towers; and the towers themselves, overlooking many a long unaltered mile of the rich country and its pleasant streams, were cutting the bright morning air, as if there were no such thing as change on earth. Yet the bells, when they sounded, told me sorrowfully of change in everything; told me of their own age, and my pretty Dora's youth; and of the many, never old, who had lived and loved and died, while

the reverberations of the bells had hummed through the rusty armor of the Black Prince hanging up within, and, notes upon the deep of Time, had lost themselves in air, as circles do in water.

I looked at the old house from the corner of the street, but did not go nearer to it, lest, being observed, I might unwittingly do any harm to the design I had come to aid. The early sun was striking edgewise on its gables and lattice windows, touching them with gold; and some beams of its old peace seemed to touch my heart.

I strolled into the country for an hour or so, and then returned by the main street, which in the interval had shaken off its last night's sleep. Among those who were stirring in the shops, I saw my ancient enemy, the butcher, now advanced to top-boots and a baby, and in business for himself. He was nursing the baby, and appeared to be a benignant member of society.

We all became very anxious and impatient when we sat down to breakfast. As it approached nearer and nearer to half-past nine o'clock, our restless expectation of Mr. Micawber increased. At last we made no more pretence of attending to the meal, which, except with Mr. Dick, had been a mere form from the first; but my aunt walked up and down the room, Traddles sat upon the sofa, affecting to read the paper with his eyes on the ceiling; and I looked out of the window to give early notice of Mr. Micawber's coming. Nor had I long to watch, for, at the first chime of the half-hour, he appeared in the street.

"Here he is," said I, "and not in his legal attire!"

My aunt tied the strings of her bonnet (she had

come down to breakfast in it), and put on her shawl, as if she were ready for anything that was resolute and uncompromising. Traddles buttoned his coat with a determined air. Mr. Dick, disturbed by these formidable appearances, but feeling it necessary to imitate them, pulled his hat, with both hands, as firmly over his ears as he possibly could; and instantly took it off again, to welcome Mr. Micawber.

"Gentlemen and madam," said Mr. Micawber, "good-morning! My dear sir," to Mr. Dick, who shook hands with him violently, "you are extremely good."

"Have you breakfasted?" said Mr. Dick. "Have a chop!"

"Not for the world, my good sir!" cried Mr. Micawber, stopping him on his way to the bell; "appetite and myself, Mr. Dixon, have long been strangers."

Mr. Dixon was so well pleased with his new name, and appeared to think it so very obliging in Mr. Micawber to confer it upon him, that he shook hands with him again, and laughed rather childishly.

"Dick," said my aunt, "attention!"

Mr. Dick recovered himself, with a blush.

"Now, sir," said my aunt to Mr. Micawber, as she put on her gloves, "we are ready for Mount Vesuvius, or anything else, as soon as *you* please."

"Madam," returned Mr. Micawber, "I trust you will shortly witness an eruption. Mr. Traddles, I have your permission, I believe, to mention here that we have been in communication together?"

"It is undoubtedly the fact, Copperfield," said Traddles, to whom I looked in surprise. "Mr. Micawber has consulted me, in reference to what

he has in contemplation; and I have advised him to the best of my judgment."

"Unless I deceive myself, Mr. Traddles," pursued Mr. Micawber, "what I contemplate is a disclosure of an important nature."

"Highly so," said Traddles.

"Perhaps, under such circumstances, madam and gentlemen," said Mr. Micawber, "you will do me the favor to submit yourselves, for the moment, to the direction of one who, however unworthy to be regarded in any other light but as a Waif and Stray upon the shore of human nature, is still your fellow-man, though crushed out of his original form by individual errors, and the accumulative force of a combination of circumstances?"

"We have perfect confidence in you, Mr. Micawber," said I, "and will do what you please."

"Mr. Copperfield," returned Mr. Micawber, "your confidence is not, at the existing juncture, ill bestowed. I would beg to be allowed a start of five minutes by the clock; and then to receive the present company, inquiring for Miss Wickfield, at the office of Wickfield and Heep, whose Stipendiary I am."

My aunt and I looked at Traddles, who nodded his approval.

"I have no more," observed Mr. Micawber, "to say at present."

With which, to my infinite surprise, he included us all in a comprehensive bow, and disappeared; his manner being extremely distant, and his face extremely pale.

Traddles only smiled, and shook his head (with his hair standing upright on the top of it), when I

looked to him for an explanation ; so I took out my watch, and, as a last resource, counted off the five minutes. My aunt, with her own watch in her hand, did the like. When the time was expired, Traddles gave her his arm ; and we all went out together to the old house, without saying one word on the way.

We found Mr. Micawber at his desk, in the turret-office on the ground-floor, either writing or pretending to write hard. The large office ruler was stuck into his waistcoat, and was not so well concealed but that a foot or more of that instrument protruded from his bosom, like a new kind of shirt-frill.

As it appeared to me that I was expected to speak, I said aloud, —

“How do you do, Mr. Micawber?”

“Mr. Copperfield,” said Mr. Micawber gravely, “I hope I see you well?”

“Is Miss Wickfield at home?” said I.

“Mr. Wickfield is unwell in bed, sir, of a rheumatic fever,” he returned ; “but Miss Wickfield, I have no doubt, will be happy to see old friends. Will you walk in, sir?”

He preceded us to the dining-room — the first room I had entered in that house — and flinging open the door of Mr. Wickfield’s former office, said, in a sonorous voice, —

“Miss Trotwood, Mr. David Copperfield, Mr. Thomas Traddles, and Mr. Dixon!”

I had not seen Uriah Heep since the time of the blow. Our visit astonished him, evidently ; not the less, I dare say, because it astonished ourselves. He did not gather his eyebrows together, for he had none worth mentioning ; but he frowned to that

degree that he almost closed his small eyes, while the hurried raising of his grisly hand to his chin betrayed some trepidation or surprise. This was only when we were in the act of entering his room, and when I caught a glance at him over my aunt's shoulder. A moment afterwards, he was as fawning and as humble as ever.

"Well, I am sure," he said. "This is indeed an unexpected pleasure! To have, as I may say, all friends round St. Paul's, at once, is a treat unlooked for! Mr. Copperfield, I hope I see you well, and — if I may unblushingly express self so — friendly towards them as is ever your friends, whether or not. Mrs. Copperfield, sir, I hope she's getting on? We have been made quite uneasy by the poor accounts we have had of her state lately, I do assure you."

I felt ashamed to let him take my hand, but I did not know yet what else to do.

"Things are changed in this office, Miss Trotwood, since I was an humble clerk, and held your pony; ain't they?" said Uriah with his sickliest smile. "But *I* am not changed, Miss Trotwood."

"Well, sir," returned my aunt, "to tell you the truth, I think you are pretty constant to the promise of your youth; if that's any satisfaction to you."

"Thank you, Miss Trotwood," said Uriah, writhing in his ungainly manner, "for your good opinion! Micawber, tell 'em to let Miss Agnes know — and mother. Mother will be quite in a state when she sees the present company!" said Uriah, setting chairs.

"You are not busy, Mr. Heep?" said Traddles, whose eye the cunning red eye accidentally caught, as it at once scrutinized and evaded us.

"No, Mr. Traddles," said Uriah, resuming his official seat, and squeezing his bony hands, laid palm to palm, between his bony knees. "Not so much as I could wish. But lawyers, sharks, and leeches are not easily satisfied, you know! Not but what myself and Micawber have our hands pretty full in general, on account of Mr. Wickfield's being hardly fit for any occupation, sir. But it's a pleasure as well as a duty, I am sure, to work for *him*. You've not been intimate with Mr. Wickfield, I think, Mr. Traddles? I believe I've only had the honor of seeing you once myself?"

"No, I have not been intimate with Mr. Wickfield," returned Traddles; "or I might perhaps have waited on you long ago, Mr. Heep."

There was something in the tone of this reply, which made Uriah look at the speaker again, with a very sinister and suspicious expression. But, seeing only Traddles, with his good-natured face, simple manner, and hair on end, he dismissed it as he replied, with a jerk of his whole body, but especially his throat. —

"I am sorry for that, Mr. Traddles. You would have admired him as much as we all do. His little failings would only have endeared him to you the more. But, if you would like to hear my fellow-partner eloquently spoken of, I should refer you to Copperfield. The family is a subject he's very strong upon, if you never heard him."

I was prevented from disclaiming the compliment (if I should have done so, in any case) by the entrance of Agnes, now ushered in by Mr. Micawber. She was not quite so self-possessed as usual, I thought; and had evidently undergone anxiety and

fatigue. But her earnest cordiality, and her quiet beauty, shone with the gentler lustre for it.

I saw Uriah watch her while she greeted us ; and he reminded me of an ugly and rebellious genie watching a good spirit. In the mean while, some slight sign passed between Mr. Micawber and Traddles ; and Traddles, unobserved except by me, went out.

"Don't wait, Micawber," said Uriah.

Mr. Micawber, with his hand upon the ruler in his breast, stood erect before the door, most unmistakably contemplating one of his fellow-men, and that man his employer.

"What are you waiting for?" said Uriah. "Micawber! did you hear me tell you not to wait?"

"Yes!" replied the immovable Mr. Micawber.

"Then why *do* you wait?" said Uriah.

"Because I — in short, choose," replied Mr. Micawber with a burst.

Uriah's cheeks lost color, and an unwholesome paleness, still faintly tinged by his pervading red, overspread them. He looked at Mr. Micawber attentively, with his whole face breathing short and quick in every feature.

"You are a dissipated fellow, as all the world knows," he said, with an effort at a smile, "and I am afraid you'll oblige me to get rid of you. Go along! I'll talk to you presently."

"If there is a scoundrel on this earth," said Mr. Micawber, suddenly breaking out again with the utmost vehemence, "with whom I have already talked too much, that scoundrel's name is — HEEP!"

Uriah fell back, as if he had been struck or stung.

Looking slowly round upon us with the darkest and wickedest expression that his face could wear, he said, in a lower voice, —

“Oho! This is a conspiracy! You have met here by appointment! You are playing Booty with my clerk, are you, Copperfield? Now, take care. You’ll make nothing of this. We understand each other, you and me. There’s no love between us. You were always a puppy with a proud stomach, from your first coming here; and you envy me my rise, do you? None of your plots against me; I’ll counterplot you! Micawber, you be off. I’ll talk to you presently.”

“Mr. Micawber,” said I, “there is a sudden change in this fellow, in more respects than the extraordinary one of his speaking the truth in one particular, which assures me that he is brought to bay. Deal with him as he deserves!”

“You are a precious set of people, ain’t you?” said Uriah, in the same low voice, and breaking out into a clammy heat, which he wiped from his forehead with his long lean hand, “to buy over my clerk, who is the very scum of society, — as you yourself were, Copperfield, you know it, before any one had charity on you, — to defame me with his lies? Miss Trotwood, you had better stop this; or I’ll stop your husband shorter than will be pleasant to you. I won’t know your story professionally, for nothing, old lady! Miss Wickfield, if you have any love for your father, you had better not join that gang. I’ll ruin him if you do. Now, come! I have got some of you under the harrow. Think twice before it goes over you. Think twice, you Micawber, if you don’t want to be crushed. I recommend

you to take yourself off, and be talked to presently, you fool! while there's time to retreat. Where's mother?" he said, suddenly appearing to notice, with alarm, the absence of Traddles, and pulling down the bell-rope. "Fine doings in a person's own house!"

"Mrs. Heep is here, sir," said Traddles, returning with that worthy mother of a worthy son. "I have taken the liberty of making myself known to her."

"Who are you to make yourself known?" retorted Uriah. "And what do you want here?"

"I am the agent and friend of Mr. Wickfield, sir," said Traddles in a composed business-like way. "And I have a power of attorney from him in my pocket, to act for him in all matters."

"The old ass has drunk himself into a state of dotage," said Uriah, turning uglier than before, "and it has been got from him by fraud!"

"Something has been got from him by fraud, I know," returned Traddles quietly; "and so do you, Mr. Heep. We will refer that question, if you please, to Mr. Micawber."

"Ury—!" Mrs. Heep began, with an anxious gesture.

"You hold your tongue, mother," he returned; "least said, soonest mended."

"But, my Ury—"

"Will you hold your tongue, mother, and leave it to me?"

Though I had long known that his servility was false, and all his pretences knavish and hollow, I had had no adequate conception of the extent of his hypocrisy until I now saw him with his mask off. The suddenness with which he dropped it, when he

perceived that it was useless to him; the malice, insolence, and hatred he revealed; the leer with which he exulted, even at this moment, in the evil he had done—all this time being desperate, too, and at his wits' end for the means of getting the better of us—though perfectly consistent with the experience I had of him, at first took even me by surprise, who had known him so long, and disliked him so heartily.

I say nothing of the look he conferred on me, as he stood eying us one after another; for I had always understood that he hated me, and I remembered the marks of my hand upon his cheek. But when his eyes passed on to Agnes, and I saw the rage with which he felt his power over her slipping away, and the exhibition, in their disappointment, of the odious passions that had led him to aspire to one whose virtues he could never appreciate or care for, I was shocked by the mere thought of her having lived, an hour, within sight of such a man.

After some rubbing of the lower part of his face, and some looking at us with those bad eyes, over his grisly fingers, he made one more address to me, half whining, and half abusive.

"You think it justifiable, do you, Copperfield, you who pride yourself so much on your honor and all the rest of it, to sneak about my place, eaves-dropping with my clerk? If it had been *me*, I shouldn't have wondered; for I don't make myself out a gentleman (though I never was in the streets either, as you were, according to Mr. Micawber), but being *you*!—And you're not afraid of doing this, either? You don't think at all of what I shall do in return; or of getting yourself into trouble for

conspiracy and so forth? Very well. We shall see! Mr. What's-your-name, you were going to refer some question to Micawber. There's your referee. Why don't you make him speak? He has learnt his lesson, I see."

Seeing that what he said had no effect on me or any of us, he sat on the edge of his table with his hands in his pockets, and one of his splay feet twisted round the other leg, waiting doggedly for what might follow.

Mr. Micawber, whose impetuosity I had restrained thus far with the greatest difficulty, and who had repeatedly interposed with the first syllable of *Scoux-drel!* without getting to the second, now burst forward, drew the ruler from his breast (apparently as a defensive weapon), and produced from his pocket a foolscap document, folded in the form of a large letter. Opening this packet, with his old flourish, and glancing at the contents as if he cherished an aristocratic admiration of their style of composition, he began to read as follows:—

"‘Dear Miss Trotwood and gentlemen —’"

"Bless and save the man!" exclaimed my aunt in a low voice. "He'd write letters by the ream, if it was a capital offence!"

Mr. Micawber, without hearing her, went on.

"‘In appearing before you to denounce probably the most consummate Villain that has ever existed,’" Mr. Micawber, without looking off the letter, pointed the ruler, like a ghostly truncheon, at Uriah Heep, "‘I ask no consideration for myself. The victim, from my cradle, of pecuniary liabilities to which I have been unable to respond, I have ever been the sport and toy of debasing circumstances. Ignominy,

Want, Despair, and Madness have, collectively or separately, been the attendants of my career.' ”

The relish with which Mr. Micawber described himself as a prey to these dismal calamities was only to be equalled by the emphasis with which he read his letter ; and the kind of homage he rendered to it with a roll of his head, when he thought he had hit a sentence very hard indeed.

“ ‘In an accumulation of Ignominy, Want, Despair, and Madness I entered the office — or, as our lively neighbor the Gaul would term it, the Bureau — of the Firm, nominally conducted under the appellation of Wickfield and — HEER, but, in reality, wielded by — HEER alone. HEER, and only HEER, is the mainspring of that machine. HEER, and only HEER, is the Forger and the Cheat.’ ”

Uriah, more blue than white at these words, made a dart at the letter, as if to tear it in pieces. Mr. Micawber, with a perfect miracle of dexterity or luck, caught his advancing knuckles with the ruler, and disabled his right hand. It dropped at the wrist, as if it were broken. The blow sounded as if it had fallen on wood.

“The Devil take you!” said Uriah, writhing in a new way with pain. “I’ll be even with you.”

“Approach me again, you — you — you HEER of infamy,” gasped Mr. Micawber, “and if your head is human, I’ll break it! Come on, come on!”

I think I never saw anything more ridiculous — I was sensible of it, even at the time — than Mr. Micawber making broadsword guards with the ruler, and crying, “Come on!” while Traddles and I pushed him back into a corner, from which, as often as we got him into it, he persisted in emerging again

His enemy, muttering to himself, after wringing his wounded hand for some time, slowly drew off his neckerchief and bound it up; then, held it in his other hand, and sat upon his table with his sullen face looking down.

Mr. Micawber, when he was sufficiently cool, proceeded with his letter.

“‘The stipendiary emoluments in consideration of which I entered into the service of—HEEP,’” always pausing before that word, and uttering it with astonishing vigor, “‘were not defined, beyond the pittance of twenty-two shillings and six per week. The rest was left contingent on the value of my professional exertions; in other and more expressive words, on the baseness of my nature, the cupidity of my motives, the poverty of my family, the general moral (or rather immoral) resemblance between myself and—HEEP. Need I say that it soon became necessary for me to solicit from—HEEP—pecuniary advances towards the support of Mrs. Micawber, and our blighted but rising family? Need I say that this necessity had been foreseen by—HEEP? That those advances were secured by I. O. U.’s and other similar acknowledgments, known to the legal institutions of this country? And that I thus became immeshed in the web he had spun for my reception?’”

Mr. Micawber’s enjoyment of his epistolary powers, in describing this unfortunate state of things, really seemed to outweigh any pain or anxiety that the reality could have caused him. He read on:—

“‘Then it was that—HEEP—began to favor me with just so much of his confidence as was necessary

to the discharge of his infernal business. Then it was that I began, if I may so Shakespearianly express myself, to dwindle, peak, and pine. I found that my services were constantly called into requisition for the falsification of business, and the mystification of an individual whom I will designate as Mr. W. That Mr. W. was imposed upon, kept in ignorance, and deluded in every possible way ; yet, that all this while, the ruffian — HEEP — was professing unbounded gratitude to, and unbounded friendship for, that much-abused gentleman. This was bad enough ; but, as the philosophic Dane observes, with that universal applicability which distinguishes the illustrious ornament of the Elizabethan Era, worse remains behind ! ”

Mr. Micawber was so very much struck by this happy rounding off with a quotation, that he indulged himself, and us, with a second reading of the sentence, under pretence of having lost his place.

“ ‘It is not my intention,’ ” he continued, reading on, “ ‘to enter on a detailed list, within the compass of the present epistle (though it is ready elsewhere), of the various malpractices of a minor nature, affecting the individual whom I have denominated Mr. W., to which I have been a tacitly consenting party. My object, when the contest within myself between stipend and no stipend, baker and no baker, existence and non-existence, ceased, was to take advantage of my opportunities to discover and expose the major malpractices committed, to that gentleman’s grievous wrong and injury, by — HEEP. Stimulated by the silent monitor within, and by a no less touching and appealing monitor without — to whom I will briefly refer as Miss W. — I entered

on a not unlaborious task of clandestine investigation, protracted now, to the best of my knowledge, information, and belief, over a period exceeding twelve calendar months.’”

He read this passage as if it were from an Act of Parliament; and appeared majestically refreshed by the sound of the words.

“‘My charges against — HEEP;’” he read on, glancing at him, and drawing the ruler into a convenient position under his left arm, in case of need, “‘are as follows.’”

We all held our breath, I think. I am sure Uriah held his.

“‘First,’” said Mr. Micawber. “‘When Mr. W.’s faculties and memory for business became, through causes into which it is not necessary or expedient for me to enter, weakened and confused, — HEEP — designedly perplexed and complicated the whole of the official transactions. When Mr. W. was least fit to enter on business, — HEEP was always at hand to force him to enter on it. He obtained Mr. W.’s signature under such circumstances to documents of importance, representing them to be other documents of no importance. He induced Mr. W. to empower him to draw out, thus, one particular sum of trust money, amounting to twelve six fourteen, two, and nine, and employed it to meet pretended business charges and deficiencies which were either already provided for, or had never really existed. He gave this proceeding, throughout, the appearance of having originated in Mr. W.’s own dishonest intention, and of having been accomplished by Mr. W.’s own dishonest act; and has used it, ever since, to torture and constrain him.’”

"You shall prove this, you Copperfield!" said Uriah, with a threatening shake of the head. "All in good time!"

"Ask — HEER — Mr. Traddles, who lived in his house after him," said Mr. Micawber, breaking off from the letter; "will you?"

"The fool himself — and lives there now," said Uriah disdainfully.

"Ask — HEER — if he ever kept a pocket-book in that house," said Mr. Micawber; "will you?"

I saw Uriah's lank hand stop, involuntarily, in the scraping of his chin.

"Or ask him," said Mr. Micawber, "if he ever burnt one there? If he says yes, and asks you where the ashes are, refer him to Wilkins Micawber, and he will hear of something not at all to his advantage!"

The triumphant flourish with which Mr. Micawber delivered himself of these words had a powerful effect in alarming the mother; who cried out in much agitation, —

"Ury, Ury! Be umble, and make terms, my dear!"

"Mother!" he retorted, "will you keep quiet? You're in a fright, and don't know what you say or mean. Umble!" he repeated, looking at me, with a snarl; "I've umbled some of 'em for a pretty long time back, umble as I was!"

Mr. Micawber, genteelly adjusting his chin in his cravat, presently proceeded with his composition.

"Second. HEER has, on several occasions, to the best of my knowledge, information, and belief —"

"But *that* won't do," muttered Uriah, relieved. "Mother, you keep quiet."

"We will endeavor to provide something that WILL do, and do for you finally, sir, very shortly," replied Mr. Micawber.

"Second. HEEP has, on several occasions, to the best of my knowledge, information, and belief, systematically forged, to various entries, books, and documents, the signature of Mr. W.; and has distinctly done so in one instance, capable of proof by me. To wit, in manner following, that is to say:—"

Again, Mr. Micawber had a relish in this formal piling up of words, which, however ludicrously displayed in his case, was, I must say, not at all peculiar to him. I have observed it, in the course of my life, in numbers of men. It seems to me to be a general rule. In the taking of legal oaths, for instance, deponents seem to enjoy themselves mightily when they come to several good words in succession, for the expression of one idea; as, that they utterly detest, abominate, and abjure, or so forth; and the old anathemas were made relishing on the same principle. We talk about the tyranny of words, but we like to tyrannize over them too; we are fond of having a large superfluous establishment of words to wait upon us on great occasions; we think it looks important, and sounds well. As we are not particular about the meaning of our liveries on state occasions, if they be but fine and numerous enough, so the meaning or necessity of our words is a secondary consideration, if there be but a great parade of them. And as individuals get into trouble by making too great a show of liveries, or as slaves when they are too numerous rise against their masters, so I think I could mention a nation

that has got into many great difficulties, and will get into many greater, from maintaining too large a retinue of words.

Mr. Micawber read on, almost smacking his lips:—

“‘To wit, in manner following, that is to say. Mr. W. being infirm, and it being within the bounds of probability that his decease might lead to some discoveries, and to the downfall of — HEEP’S — power over the W. family, — as I, Wilkins Micawber, the undersigned, assume — unless the filial affection of his daughter could be secretly influenced from allowing any investigation of the partnership affairs to be ever made, the said — HEEP — deemed it expedient to have a bond ready by him, as from Mr. W., for the before-mentioned sum of twelve six fourteen, two, and nine, with interest, stated therein to have been advanced by — HEEP — to Mr. W. to save Mr. W. from dishonor; though really the sum was never advanced by him, and has long been replaced. The signatures to this instrument, purporting to be executed by Mr. W. and attested by Wilkins Micawber, are forgeries by — HEEP. I have in my possession, in his hand and pocket-book, several similar imitations of Mr. W.’s signature, here and there defaced by fire, but legible to any one. I never attested any such document. And I have the document itself in my possession.’”

Uriah Heep, with a start, took out of his pocket a bunch of keys, and opened a certain drawer; then suddenly bethought himself of what he was about, and turned again towards us, without looking in it.

“‘And I have the document,’” Mr. Micawber read on again, looking about as if it were the text of

a sermon, “‘in my possession,’ — that is to say, I had, early this morning, when this was written, but have since relinquished it to Mr. Traddles.”

“It is quite true,” assented Traddles.

“Ury, Ury!” cried the mother, “be umble, and make terms. I know my son will be umble, gentlemen, if you’ll give him time to think. Mr. Copperfield, I’m sure you know that he was always very umble, sir!”

It was singular to see how the mother still held to the old trick, when the son had abandoned it as useless.

“Mother,” he said, with an impatient bite at the handkerchief in which his hand was wrapped, “you had better take and fire a loaded gun at me.”

“But I love you, Ury,” cried Mrs. Heep. And I have no doubt she did; or that he loved her, however strange it may appear; though, to be sure, they were a congenial couple. “And I can’t bear to hear you provoking the gentleman, and endangering of yourself more. I told the gentleman at first, when he told me upstairs it was come to light, that I would answer for your being umble, and making amends. Oh, see how umble *I* am, gentlemen, and don’t mind him!”

“Why, there’s Copperfield, mother,” he angrily retorted, pointing his lean finger at me, against whom all his animosity was levelled, as the prime mover in the discovery; and I did not undeceive him; “there’s Copperfield would have given you a hundred pound to say less than you’ve blurted out!”

“I can’t help it, Ury,” cried his mother. “I can’t see you running into danger, through carrying your head so high. Better be umble, as you always was.”

He remained for a little, biting the handkerchief, and then said to me with a scowl, —

“What more have you got to bring forward? If anything, go on with it. What do you look at me for?”

Mr. Micawber promptly resumed his letter, only too glad to revert to a performance with which he was so highly satisfied.

“‘Third. And last. I am now in a condition to show, by — HEER’S — false books, and — HEER’S — real memoranda, beginning with the partially destroyed pocket-book (which I was unable to comprehend, at the time of its accidental discovery by Mrs. Micawber, on our taking possession of our present abode, in the locker or bin devoted to the reception of the ashes calcined on our domestic hearth), that the weaknesses, the faults, the very virtues, the parental affections, and the sense of honor, of the unhappy Mr. W. have been for years acted on by, and warped to the base purposes of — HEER. That Mr. W. has been for years deluded and plundered, in every conceivable manner, to the pecuniary aggrandizement of the avaricious, false, and grasping — HEER. That the engrossing object of — HEER — was, next to gain, to subdue Mr. and Miss W. (of his ulterior views in reference to the latter I say nothing) entirely to himself. That his last act, completed but a few months since, was to induce Mr. W. to execute a relinquishment of his share in the partnership, and even a bill of sale on the very furniture of his house, in consideration of a certain annuity, to be well and truly paid by — HEER — on the four common quarter-days in each and every year. That these meshes; beginning

with alarming and falsified accounts of the estate of which Mr. W. is the receiver, at a period when Mr. W. had launched into imprudent and ill-judged speculations, and may not have had the money, for which he was morally and legally responsible, in hand; going on with pretended borrowings of money at enormous interest, really coming from — HEEP — and by — HEEP — fraudulently obtained or withheld from Mr. W. himself, on pretence of such speculations or otherwise; perpetuated by a miscellaneous catalogue of unscrupulous chicaneries — gradually thickened, until the unhappy Mr. W. could see no world beyond. Bankrupt, as he believed, alike in circumstances, in all other hope, and in honor, his sole reliance was upon the monster in the garb of man,'” — Mr. Micawber made a good deal of this, as a new turn of expression, — “‘who, by making himself necessary to him, had achieved his destruction. All this I undertake to show. Probably much more!’”

I whispered a few words to Agnes, who was weeping, half joyfully, half sorrowfully, at my side; and there was a movement among us, as if Mr. Micawber had finished. He said, with exceeding gravity, “Pardon me,” and proceeded, with a mixture of the lowest spirits and the most intense enjoyment, to the peroration of his letter.

“‘I have now concluded. It merely remains for me to substantiate these accusations; and then, with my ill-starred family, to disappear from the landscape on which we appear to be an incumbrance. That is soon done. It may be reasonably inferred that our baby will first expire of inanition, as being the frailest member of our circle; and that our

twins will follow next in order. So be it ! For myself, my Canterbury Pilgrimage has done much ; imprisonment on civil process, and want, will soon do more. I trust that the labor and hazard of an investigation — of which the smallest results have been slowly pieced together, in the pressure of arduous avocations, under grinding penurious apprehensions, at rise of morn, at dewy eve, in the shadows of night, under the watchful eye of one whom it were superfluous to call Demon — combined with the struggle of parental Poverty to turn it, when completed, to the right account, may be as the sprinkling of a few drops of sweet water on my funeral pyre. I ask no more. Let it be, in justice, merely said of me, as of a gallant and eminent naval Hero, with whom I have no pretensions to cope, that what I have done, I did, in despite of mercenary and selfish objects,

For England, home, and Beauty.

“ ‘ Remaining always, &c. &c.,
“ ‘ WILKINS MICAWBER.’ ”

Much affected, but still intensely enjoying himself, Mr. Micawber folded up his letter, and handed it with a bow to my aunt, as something she might like to keep.

There was, as I had noticed on my first visit long ago, an iron safe in the room. The key was in it. A hasty suspicion seemed to strike Uriah ; and, with a glance at Mr. Micawber, he went to it, and threw the doors clanking open. It was empty.

“ Where are the books ? ” he cried with a frightful face. “ Some thief has stolen the books ! ”

Mr. Micawber tapped himself with the ruler. “ I

did, when I got the key from you as usual — but a little earlier — and opened it this morning.”

“Don’t be uneasy,” said Traddles. “They have come into my possession. I will take care of them, under the authority I mentioned.”

“You receive stolen goods, do you?” cried Uriah.

“Under such circumstances,” answered Traddles, “Yes.”

What was my astonishment when I beheld my aunt, who had been profoundly quiet and attentive, make a dart at Uriah Heep, and seize him by the collar with both hands!

“You know what *I* want?” said my aunt.

“A strait-waistcoat,” said he.

“No. My Property!” returned my aunt. “Agnes, my dear, as long as I believed it had been really made away with by your father, I wouldn’t — and, my dear, I didn’t, even to Trot, as he knows — breathe a syllable of its having been placed here for investment. But now I know this fellow’s answerable for it, and I’ll have it! Trot, come and take it away from him!”

Whether my aunt supposed, for the moment, that he kept her property in his neckerchief, I am sure I don’t know; but she certainly pulled at it as if she thought so. I hastened to put myself between them, and to assure her that we would all take care that he should make the utmost restitution of everything he had wrongly got. This, and a few moments’ reflection, pacified her; but she was not at all disconcerted by what she had done (though I cannot say as much for her bonnet), and resumed her seat composedly.

During the last few minutes Mrs. Heep had been

clamoring to her son to be "umble;" and had been going down on her knees to all of us in succession, and making the wildest promises. Her son sat her down in his chair; and, standing sulkily by her, holding her arm with his hand, but not rudely, said to me, with a ferocious look, —

"What do you want done?"

"I will tell you what must be done," said Traddles.

"Has that Copperfield no tongue?" muttered Uriah. "I would do a good deal for you if you could tell me, without lying, that somebody had cut it out."

"My Uriah means to be umble!" cried his mother. "Don't mind what he says, good gentlemen!"

"What must be done," said Traddles, "is this. First, the deed of relinquishment, that we have heard of, must be given over to me now — here."

"Suppose I haven't got it?" he interrupted.

"But you have," said Traddles; "therefore, you know, we won't suppose so." And I cannot help avowing that this was the first occasion on which I really did justice to the clear head, and the plain, patient, practical good sense, of my old schoolfellow. "Then," said Traddles, "you must prepare to disgorge all that your rapacity has become possessed of, and to make restoration to the last farthing. All the partnership books and papers must remain in our possession; all your books and papers; all money accounts and securities, of both kinds. In short, everything here."

"Must it? I don't know that," said Uriah. "I must have time to think about that."

"Certainly," replied Traddles; "but, in the mean while, and until everything is done to our satisfaction, we shall maintain possession of these things; and beg you—in short, compel you—to keep your own room, and hold no communication with any one."

"I won't do it!" said Uriah with an oath.

"Maidstone Jail is a safer place of detention," observed Traddles; "and though the law may be longer in righting us, and may not be able to right us so completely as you can, there is no doubt of its punishing *you*. Dear me, you know that quite as well as I! Copperfield, will you go round to the Guildhall, and bring a couple of officers?"

Here, Mrs. Heep broke out again, crying on her knees to Agnes to interfere in their behalf, exclaiming that he was very humble, and it was all true, and if he didn't do what we wanted, she would, and much more to the same purpose; being half frantic with fears for her darling. To inquire what he might have done, if he had had any boldness, would be like inquiring what a mongrel cur might do, if it had the spirit of a tiger. He was a coward, from head to foot; and showed his dastardly nature through his sullenness and mortification, as much as at any time of his mean life.

"Stop!" he growled to me; and wiped his hot face with his hand. "Mother, hold your noise. Well! Let 'em have that deed. Go and fetch it!"

"Do you help her, Mr. Dick," said Traddles, "if you please."

Proud of his commission, and understanding it, Mr. Dick accompanied her as a shepherd's dog might accompany a sheep. But, Mrs. Heep gave

him little trouble; for she not only returned with the deed, but with the box in which it was, where we found a banker's book and some other papers that were afterwards serviceable.

"Good!" said Traddles when this was brought. "Now, Mr. Heep, you can retire to think: particularly observing, if you please, that I declare to you, on the part of all present, that there is only one thing to be done; that it is what I have explained; and that it must be done without delay."

Uriah, without lifting his eyes from the ground, shuffled across the room with his hand to his chin, and pausing at the door, said, —

"Copperfield, I have always hated you. You've always been an upstart, and you've always been against me."

"As I think I told you once before," said I, "it is you who have been, in your greed and cunning, against all the world. It may be profitable to you to reflect, in future, that there never were greed and cunning in the world yet, that did not do too much, and overreach themselves. It is as certain as death."

"Or as certain as they used to teach at school (the same school where I picked up so much unbleness), from nine o'clock to eleven, that labor was a curse; and from eleven o'clock to one, that it was a blessing and a cheerfulness, and a dignity, and I don't know what all, eh?" said he with a sneer. "You preach about as consistent as they did. Won't unbleness go down? I shouldn't have got round my gentleman fellow-partner without it, I think. — Micawber, you old bully, I'll pay *you*!"

Mr. Micawber, supremely defiant of him and his

extended finger, and making a great deal of his chest until he had slunk out at the door, then addressed himself to me, and proffered me the satisfaction of "witnessing the re-establishment of mutual confidence between himself and Mrs. Micawber." After which he invited the company generally to the contemplation of that affecting spectacle.

"The veil that has long been interposed between Mrs. Micawber and myself is now withdrawn," said Mr. Micawber; "and my children and the Author of their Being can once more come in contact on equal terms."

As we were all very grateful to him, and all desirous to show that we were, as well as the hurry and disorder of our spirits would permit, I dare say we should all have gone, but that it was necessary for Agnes to return to her father, as yet unable to bear more than the dawn of hope; and for some one else to hold Uriah in safe-keeping. So Traddles remained for the latter purpose, to be presently relieved by Mr. Dick; and Mr. Dick, my aunt, and I went home with Mr. Micawber. As I parted hurriedly from the dear girl to whom I owed so much, and thought from what she had been saved, perhaps, that morning—her better resolution notwithstanding—I felt devoutly thankful for the miseries of my younger days which had brought me to the knowledge of Mr. Micawber.

His house was not far off; and as the street-door opened into the sitting-room, and he bolted in with a precipitation quite his own, we found ourselves at once in the bosom of the family. Mr. Micawber exclaiming, "Emma! my life!" rushed into Mrs. Micawber's arms. Mrs. Micawber shrieked, and



folded Mr. Micawber in her embrace. Miss Micawber, nursing the unconscious stranger of Mrs. Micawber's last letter to me, was sensibly affected. The stranger leaped. The twins testified their joy by several inconvenient but innocent demonstrations. Master Micawber, whose disposition appeared to have been soured by early disappointment, and whose aspect had become morose, yielded to his better feelings and blubbered.

"Emma!" said Mr. Micawber. "The cloud is passed from my mind. Mutual confidence, so long preserved between us once, is restored, to know no further interruption. Now, welcome poverty!" cried Mr. Micawber, shedding tears. "Welcome misery, welcome houselessness, welcome hunger, rags, tempest, and beggary! Mutual confidence will sustain us to the end!"

With these expressions, Mr. Micawber placed Mrs. Micawber in a chair, and embraced the family all round; welcoming a variety of bleak prospects, which appeared, to the best of my judgment, to be anything but welcome to them; and calling upon them to come out into Canterbury and sing a chorus, as nothing else was left for their support.

But Mrs. Micawber having, in the strength of her emotions, fainted away, the first thing to be done, even before the chorus could be considered complete, was to recover her. This my aunt and Mr. Micawber did; and then my aunt was introduced, and Mrs. Micawber recognized me.

"Excuse me, dear Mr. Copperfield," said the poor lady, giving me her hand, "but I am not strong; and the removal of the late misunderstanding between Mr. Micawber and myself was at first too much for me."

"Is this all your family, ma'am?" said my aunt.

"There are no more at present," returned Mrs. Micawber.

"Good gracious, I didn't mean that, ma'am!" said my aunt. "I mean are all these yours?"

"Madam," replied Mr. Micawber, "it is a true bill."

"And that eldest young gentleman, now," said my aunt, musing, "what has *he* been brought up to?"

"It was my hope when I came here," said Mr. Micawber, "to have got Wilkins into the Church: or perhaps I shall express my meaning more strictly if I say the Choir. But there was no vacancy for a tenor in the venerable Pile for which this city is so justly eminent; and he has—in short, he has contracted a habit of singing in public-houses, rather than in sacred edifices."

"But he means well," said Mrs. Micawber tenderly.

"I dare say, my love," rejoined Mr. Micawber, "that he means particularly well; but I have not yet found that he carries out his meaning, in any given direction whatsoever."

Master Micawber's moroseness of aspect returned upon him again, and he demanded, with some temper, what he was to do? Whether he had been born a carpenter, or a coach painter, any more than he had been born a bird? Whether he could go into the next street, and open a chemist's shop? Whether he could rush to the next assizes, and proclaim himself a lawyer? Whether he could come out by force at the opera, and succeed by violence? Whether he could do anything, without being brought up to something?

My aunt mused a little while, and then said, —

“Mr. Micawber, I wonder you have never turned your thoughts to emigration.”

“Madam,” returned Mr. Micawber, “it was the dream of my youth, and the fallacious aspiration of my riper years.” I am thoroughly persuaded, by the by, that he had never thought of it in his life.

“Ay?” said my aunt, with a glance at me. “Why, what a thing it would be for yourselves and your family, Mr. and Mrs. Micawber, if you were to emigrate now.”

“Capital, madam, capital,” urged Mr. Micawber gloomily.

“That is the principal, I may say the only difficulty, my dear Mr. Copperfield,” assented his wife.

“Capital!” cried my aunt. “But you are doing us a great service — have done us a great service, I may say, for surely much will come out of the fire — and what could we do for you, that would be half so good as to find the capital?”

“I could not receive it as a gift,” said Mr. Micawber, full of fire and animation, “but if a sufficient sum could be advanced, say at five per cent interest per annum, upon my personal liability — say my notes of hand, at twelve, eighteen, and twenty-four months respectively, to allow time for something to turn up — ”

“Could be? Can be and shall be, on your own terms,” returned my aunt, “if you say the word. Think of this, now, both of you. Here are some people David knows, going out to Australia shortly. If you decide to go, why shouldn’t you go in the same ship? You may help each other. Think of

this, now, Mr. and Mrs. Micawber. Take your time, and weigh it well."

"There is but one question, my dear ma'am, I could wish to ask," said Mrs. Micawber. "The climate, I believe, is healthy?"

"Finest in the world!" said my aunt.

"Just so," returned Mrs. Micawber. "Then my question arises. Now, *are* the circumstances of the country such, that a man of Mr. Micawber's abilities would have a fair chance of rising in the social scale? I will not say, at present, might he aspire to be Governor, or anything of that sort; but would there be a reasonable opening for his talents to develop themselves—that would be amply sufficient—and find their own expansion?"

"No better opening anywhere," said my aunt, "for a man who conducts himself well, and is industrious."

"For a man who conducts himself well," repeated Mrs. Micawber, with her clearest business manner, "and is industrious. Precisely. It is evident to me that Australia is the legitimate sphere of action for Mr. Micawber!"

"I entertain the conviction, my dear madam," said Mr. Micawber, "that it is, under existing circumstances, the land, the only land, for myself and family: and that something of an extraordinary nature will turn up on that shore. It is no distance—comparatively speaking; and though consideration is due to the kindness of your proposal, I assure you that is a mere matter of form."

Shall I ever forget how, in a moment, he was the most sanguine of men, looking on to fortune; or how Mrs. Micawber presently discoursed about the

habits of the kangaroo? Shall I ever recall that street of Canterbury on a market-day, without recalling him, as he walked back with us; expressing, in the hardy roving manner he assumed, the unsettled habits of a temporary sojourner in the land; and looking at the bullocks, as they came by, with the eyes of an Australian farmer?

CHAPTER XIV.

ANOTHER RETROSPECT.

I MUST pause yet once again. Oh, my child-wife, there is a figure in the moving crowd before my memory, quiet and still, saying, in its innocent love and childish beauty, Stop to think of me — turn to look upon the little blossom, as it flutters to the ground!

I do. All else grows dim, and fades away. I am again with Dora in our cottage. I do not know how long she has been ill. I am so used to it in feeling, that I cannot count the time. It is not really long, in weeks or months; but, in my usage and experience, it is a weary, weary while.

They have left off telling me to “wait a few days more.” I have begun to fear, remotely, that the day may never shine when I shall see my child-wife running in the sunlight, with her old friend Jip.

He is, as it were suddenly, grown very old. It may be that he misses in his mistress something that enlivened him and made him younger; but he mopes, and his sight is weak, and his limbs are feeble, and my aunt is sorry that he objects to her no more, but creeps near her as he lies on Dora’s bed — she sitting at the bedside — and mildly licks her hand.

Dora lies smiling on us, and is beautiful, and utters no hasty or complaining word. She says that we are very good to her; that her dear old careful boy is tiring himself out, she knows; that my aunt has no sleep, yet is always wakeful, active, and kind. Sometimes, the little bird-like ladies come to see her; and then we talk about our wedding-day, and all that happy time.

What a strange rest and pause in my life there seems to be — and in all life, within doors and without — when I sit in the quiet, shaded, orderly room, with the blue eyes of my child-wife turned towards me, and her little fingers twining round my hand! Many and many an hour I sit thus; but, of all those times, three times come the freshest on my mind.

It is morning; and Dora, made so trim by my aunt's hands, shows me how her pretty hair *will* curl upon the pillow yet, and how long and bright it is, and how she likes to have it loosely gathered in that net she wears.

"Not that I am vain of it now, you mocking boy," she says when I smile; "but because you used to say you thought it so beautiful; and because, when I first began to think about you, I used to peep in the glass, and wonder whether you would like very much to have a lock of it. Oh, what a foolish fellow you were, Doady, when I gave you one!"

"That was on the day when you were painting the flowers I had given you, Dora, and when I told you how much in love I was."

"Ah! but I didn't like to tell *you*," says Dora, "*then*, how I had cried over them, because I believed

you really liked me! When I can run about again, as I used to do, Doady, let us go and see those places where we were such a silly couple, shall we? And take some of the old walks? And not forget poor papa?"

"Yes, we will, and have some happy days. So you must make haste to get well, my dear!"

"Oh, I shall soon do that! I am so much better, you don't know!"

It is evening; and I sit in the same chair, by the same bed, with the same face turned towards me. We have been silent, and there is a smile upon her face. I have ceased to carry my light burden up and down stairs now. She lies here all the day.

"Doady!"

"My dear Dora!"

"You won't think what I am going to say unreasonable, after what you told me, such a little while ago, of Mr. Wickfield's not being well? I want to see Agnes. Very much I want to see her."

"I will write to her, my dear."

"Will you?"

"Directly."

"What a good, kind boy! Doady, take me on your arm. Indeed, my dear, it's not a whim. It's not a foolish fancy. I want very much indeed to see her!"

"I am certain of it. I have only to tell her so, and she is sure to come."

"You are very lonely when you go downstairs now?" Dora whispers, with her arm about my neck.

"How can I be otherwise, my own love, when I see your empty chair?"

"My empty chair?" She elings to me for a little while in silence. "And you really miss me, Doady?" looking up, and brightly smiling. "Even poor, giddy, stupid me?"

"My heart, who is there upon earth that I could miss so much?"

"Oh, husband! I am so glad, yet so sorry!" creeping closer to me, and folding me in both her arms. She laughs and sobs, and then is quiet, and quite happy.

"Quite!" she says. "Only give Agnes my dear love, and tell her that I want very, very much to see her; and I have nothing left to wish for."

"Except to get well again, Dora."

"Ah, Doady! Sometimes I think — you know I always was a silly little thing! — that that will never be!"

"Don't say so, Dora! Dearest love, don't think so!"

"I won't, if I can help it, Doady. But I am very happy; though my dear boy is so lonely by himself, before his child-wife's empty chair!"

It is night; and I am with her still. Agnes has arrived; has been among us for a whole day and an evening. She, my aunt, and I have sat with Dora since the morning, all together. We have not talked much, but Dora has been perfectly contented and cheerful. We are now alone.

Do I know, now, that my child-wife will soon leave me? They have told me so; they have told me nothing new to my thoughts; but I am far from sure that I have taken that truth to heart. I cannot master it. I have withdrawn by myself, many times

to-day, to weep. I have remembered Who wept for a parting between the living and the dead. I have bethought me of all that gracious and compassionate history. I have tried to resign myself, and to console myself; and that, I hope, I may have done imperfectly; but what I cannot firmly settle in my mind is, that the end will absolutely come. I hold her hand in mine, I hold her heart in mine, I see her love for me, alive in all its strength. I cannot shut out the pale lingering shadow of belief that she will be spared.

"I am going to speak to you, Doady. I am going to say something I have often thought of saying lately. You won't mind?" with a gentle look.

"Mind, my darling?"

"Because I don't know what you will think, or what you may have thought sometimes. Perhaps you have often thought the same. Doady, dear, I am afraid I was too young."

I lay my face upon the pillow by her, and she looks into my eyes, and speaks very softly. Gradually, as she goes on, I feel with a stricken heart that she is speaking of herself as past.

"I am afraid, dear, I was too young. I don't mean in years only, but in experience, and thoughts, and everything. I was such a silly little creature. I am afraid it would have been better if we had only loved each other as a boy and girl, and forgotten it. I have begun to think I was not fit to be a wife."

I try to stay my tears, and to reply, "Oh, Dora, love, as fit as I to be a husband!"

"I don't know," with the old shake of her curls. "Perhaps! But, if I had been more fit to be married, I might have made you more so, too. Besides, you are very clever, and I never was."

"We have been very happy, my sweet Dora."

"I was very happy, very. But, as years went on, my dear boy would have wearied of his child-wife. She would have been less and less a companion for him. He would have been more and more sensible of what was wanting in his home. She wouldn't have improved. It is better as it is."

"Oh, Dora, dearest, dearest, do not speak to me so! Every word seems a reproach!"

"No, not a syllable!" she answers, kissing me. "Oh, my dear, you never deserved it, and I loved you far too well to say a reproachful word to you in earnest—it was all the merit I had, except being pretty—or you thought me so. Is it lonely downstairs, Doady?"

"Very! Very!"

"Don't cry! Is my chair there?"

"In its old place."

"Oh, how my poor boy cries! Hush, hush! Now, make me one promise. I want to speak to Agnes. When you go downstairs, tell Agnes so, and send her up to me; and while I speak to her, let no one come—not even aunt. I want to speak to Agnes by herself. I want to speak to Agnes quite alone."

I promise that she shall immediately; but I cannot leave her, for my grief.

"I said that it was better as it is!" she whispers as she holds me in her arms. "Oh, Doady, after more years, you never could have loved your child-wife better than you do; and, after more years, she would so have tried and disappointed you, that you might not have been able to love her half so well!"

I know I was too young and foolish. It is much better as it is !”

Agnes is downstairs when I go into the parlor; and I give her the message. She disappears, leaving me alone with Jip.

His Chinese house is by the fire; and he lies within it, on his bed of flannel, querulously trying to sleep. The bright moon is high and clear. As I look out on the night, my tears fall fast, and my undisciplined heart is chastened heavily — heavily.

I sit down by the fire, thinking with a blind remorse of all those secret feelings I have nourished since my marriage. I think of every little trifle between me and Dora, and feel the truth, that trifles make the sum of life. Ever rising from the sea of my remembrance is the image of the dear child as I knew her first, graced by my young love, and by her own, with every fascination wherein such love is rich. Would it, indeed, have been better if we had loved each other as a boy and girl, and forgotten it? Undisciplined heart, reply!

How the time wears, I know not; until I am recalled by my child-wife's old companion. More restless than he was, he crawls out of his house, and looks at me, and wanders to the door, and whines to go upstairs.

“Not to-night, Jip! Not to-night!”

He comes very slowly back to me, licks my hand, and lifts his dim eyes to my face.

“Oh, Jip! It may be, never again!”

He lies down at my feet, stretches himself out as if to sleep, and, with a plaintive cry, is dead.

“Oh, Agnes! Look, look, here!”



—That face, so full of pity, and of grief, that rain of tears, that awful mute appeal to me, that solemn hand upraised towards Heaven !

“Agnes !”

It is over. Darkness comes before my eyes ; and, for a time, all things are blotted out of my remembrance.

CHAPTER XV.

MR. MICAWBER'S TRANSACTIONS.

THIS is not the time at which I am to enter on the state of my mind beneath its load of sorrow. I came to think that the future was walled up before me, that the energy and action of my life were at an end, that I never could find any refuge but in the grave. I came to think so, I say, but not in the first shock of my grief. It slowly grew to that. If the events I go on to relate had not thickened around me, in the beginning to confuse, and in the end to augment, my affliction, it is possible (though I think not probable) that I might have fallen at once into this condition. As it was, an interval occurred before I fully knew my own distress; an interval, in which I even supposed that its sharpest pangs were past; and when my mind could soothe itself by resting on all that was most innocent and beautiful, in the tender story that was closed forever.

When it was first proposed that I should go abroad, or how it came to be agreed among us that I was to seek the restoration of my peace in change and travel, I do not, even now, distinctly know. The spirit of Agnes so pervaded all we thought, and said, and did, in that time of sorrow, that I

assume I may refer the project to her influence. But her influence was so quiet that I know no more.

And now, indeed, I began to think that in my old association of her with the stained-glass window in the church, a prophetic foreshadowing of what she would be to me, in the calamity that was to happen in the fulness of time, had found a way into my mind. In all that sorrow, from the moment, never to be forgotten, when she stood before me with her upraised hand, she was like a sacred presence in my lonely house. When the Angel of Death alighted there, my child-wife fell asleep—they told me so when I could bear to hear it—on her bosom, with a smile. From my swoon, I first awoke to a consciousness of her compassionate tears, her words of hope and peace, her gentle face bending down as from a purer region nearer Heaven, over my undisciplined heart, and softening its pain.

Let me go on.

I was to go abroad. That seemed to have been determined among us from the first. The ground now covering all that could perish of my departed wife, I waited only for what Mr. Micawber called the “final pulverization of Heep,” and for the departure of the emigrants.

At the request of Traddles, most affectionate and devoted of friends in my trouble, we returned to Canterbury: I mean my aunt, Agnes, and I. We proceeded by appointment straight to Mr. Micawber's house; where, and at Mr. Wickfield's, my friend had been laboring ever since our explosive meeting. When poor Mrs. Micawber saw me come in, in my black clothes, she was sensibly affected. There was

a great deal of good in Mrs. Micawber's heart, which had not been dummed out of it in all those many years.

"Well, Mr. and Mrs. Micawber," was my aunt's first salutation after we were seated. "Pray, have you thought about that emigration proposal of mine?"

"My dear madam," returned Mr. Micawber, "perhaps I cannot better express the conclusion at which Mrs. Micawber, your humble servant, and I may add our children, have jointly and severally arrived, than by borrowing the language of an illustrious poet, to reply that our Boat is on the shore, and our Bark is on the sea."

"That's right," said my aunt. "I augur all sorts of good from your sensible decision."

"Madam, you do us a great deal of honor," he rejoined. He then referred to a memorandum. "With respect to the pecuniary assistance enabling us to launch our frail canoe on the ocean of enterprise, I have reconsidered that important business point; and would beg to propose my notes of hand — drawn, it is needless to stipulate, on stamps of the amounts respectively required by the various Acts of Parliament applying to such securities — at eighteen, twenty-four, and thirty months. The proposition I originally submitted was twelve, eighteen, and twenty-four; but I am apprehensive that such an arrangement might not allow sufficient time for the requisite amount of — Something — to turn up. We might not," said Mr. Micawber, looking round the room as if it represented several hundred acres of highly cultivated land, "on the first responsibility becoming due, have been successful in our

harvest, or we might not have got our harvest in. Labor, I believe, is sometimes difficult to obtain in that portion of our colonial possessions where it will be our lot to combat with the teeming soil."

"Arrange it in any way you please, sir," said my aunt.

"Madam," he replied, "Mrs. Micawber and myself are deeply sensible of the very considerate kindness of our friends and patrons. What I wish is, to be perfectly business-like, and perfectly punctual. Turning over, as we are about to turn over, an entirely new leaf; and falling back, as we are now in the act of falling back, for a Spring of no common magnitude; it is important to my sense of self-respect, besides being an example to my son, that these arrangements should be concluded as between man and man."

I don't know that Mr. Micawber attached any meaning to this last phrase; I don't know that anybody ever does, or did; but he appeared to relish it uncommonly, and repeated, with an impressive cough, "as between man and man."

"I propose," said Mr. Micawber, "Bills — a convenience to the mercantile world, for which, I believe, we are originally indebted to the Jews, who appear to me to have had a devilish deal too much to do with them ever since — because they are negotiable. But if a Bond, or any other description of security, would be preferred, I should be happy to execute any such instrument. As between man and man."

My aunt observed that, in a case where both parties were willing to agree to anything, she took it for granted there would be no difficulty in settling this point. Mr. Micawber was of her opinion.

"In reference to our domestic preparations, madam," said Mr. Micawber with some pride, "for meeting the destiny to which we are now understood to be self-devoted, I beg to report them. My eldest daughter attends at five every morning in a neighboring establishment, to acquire the process — if process it may be called — of milking cows. My younger children are instructed to observe, as closely as circumstances will permit, the habits of the pigs and poultry maintained in the poorer parts of this city: a pursuit from which they have, on two occasions, been brought home, within an inch of being run over. I have myself directed some attention, during the past week, to the art of baking; and my son Wilkins has issued forth with a walking-stick and driven cattle, when permitted, by the rugged hirelings who had them in charge, to render any voluntary service in that direction — which I regret to say, for the credit of our nature, was not often; he being generally warned, with imprecations, to desist."

"All very right indeed," said my aunt encouragingly. "Mrs. Micawber has been busy, too, I have no doubt."

"My dear madam," returned Mrs. Micawber with her business-like air, "I am free to confess, that I have not been actively engaged in pursuits immediately connected with cultivation or with stock, though well aware that both will claim my attention on a foreign shore. Such opportunities as I have been enabled to alienate from my domestic duties, I have devoted to corresponding at some length with my family. For I own it seems to me, my dear Mr. Copperfield," said Mrs. Micawber, who

always fell back on me, I suppose from old habit, to whomsoever else she might address her discourse at starting, "that the time is come when the past should be buried in oblivion; when my family should take Mr. Micawber by the hand, and Mr. Micawber should take my family by the hand; when the lion should lie down with the lamb, and my family be on terms with Mr. Micawber."

I said I thought so too.

"This, at least, is the light, my dear Mr. Copperfield," pursued Mrs. Micawber, "in which *I* view the subject. When I lived at home with my papa and mamma, my papa was accustomed to ask, when any point was under discussion in our limited circle, 'In what light does my Emma view the subject?' That my papa was too partial, I know; still, on such a point as the frigid coldness which has ever subsisted between Mr. Micawber and my family, I necessarily have formed an opinion, delusive though it may be."

"No doubt. Of course you have, ma'am," said my aunt.

"Precisely so," assented Mrs. Micawber. "Now, I may be wrong in my conclusions; it is very likely that I am; but my individual impression is, that the gulf between my family and Mr. Micawber may be traced to an apprehension, on the part of my family, that Mr. Micawber would require pecuniary accommodation. I cannot help thinking," said Mrs. Micawber with an air of deep sagacity, "that there are members of my family who have been apprehensive that Mr. Micawber would solicit them for their names.—I do not mean to be conferred in Baptism upon our children, but to be inscribed on

Bills of Exchange, and negotiated in the Money Market."

The look of penetration with which Mrs. Micawber announced this discovery, as if no one had ever thought of it before, seemed rather to astonish my aunt, who abruptly replied, "Well, ma'am, upon the whole. I shouldn't wonder if you were right!"

"Mr. Micawber being now on the eve of casting off the pecuniary shackles that have so long thrall'd him," said Mrs. Micawber, "and of commencing a new career in a country where there is sufficient range for his abilities, — which, in my opinion, is exceedingly important; Mr. Micawber's abilities peculiarly requiring space, — it seems to me that my family should signalize the occasion by coming forward. What I could wish to see would be a meeting between Mr. Micawber and my family at a festive entertainment, to be given at my family's expense; where Mr. Micawber's health and prosperity being proposed by some leading member of my family, Mr. Micawber might have an opportunity of developing his views."

"My dear," said Mr. Micawber with some heat, "it may be better for me to state distinctly, at once, that if I were to develop my views to that assembled group, they would possibly be found of an offensive nature; my impression being that your family are, in the aggregate, impertinent Snobs; and, in detail, unmitigated Ruffians."

"Micawber," said Mrs. Micawber, shaking her head, "no! You have never understood them, and they have never understood you."

Mr. Micawber coughed.

"They have never understood you, Micawber,"

said his wife. "They may be incapable of it. If so, that is their misfortune. I can pity their misfortune."

"I am extremely sorry, my dear Emma," said Mr. Micawber, relenting, "to have been betrayed into any expressions that might, even remotely, have the appearance of being strong expressions. All I would say is, that I can go abroad without your family coming forward to favor me, — in short, with a parting shove of their cold shoulders; and that, upon the whole, I would rather leave England with such impetus as I possess, than derive any acceleration of it from that quarter. At the same time, my dear, if they should condescend to reply to your communications — which our joint experience renders most improbable — far be it from me to be a barrier to your wishes."

The matter being thus amicably settled, Mr. Micawber gave Mrs. Micawber his arm, and, glancing at the heap of books and papers lying before Traddles on the table, said they would leave us to ourselves; which they ceremoniously did.

"My dear Copperfield," said Traddles, leaning back in his chair when they were gone, and looking at me with an affection that made his eyes red, and his hair all kinds of shapes, "I don't make any excuse for troubling you with business, because I know you are deeply interested in it, and it may divert your thoughts. My dear boy, I hope you are not worn out?"

"I am quite myself," said I after a pause. "We have more cause to think of my aunt than of any one. You know how much she has done."

"Surely, surely," answered Traddles. "Who can forget it?"

"But even that is not all," said I. "During the last fortnight some new trouble has vexed her; and she has been in and out of London every day. Several times she has gone out early, and been absent until evening. Last night, Traddles, with this journey before her, it was almost midnight before she came home. You know what her consideration for others is. She will not tell me what has happened to distress her."

My aunt, very pale, and with deep lines in her face, sat immovable until I had finished; when some stray tears found their way to her cheeks, and she put her hand on mine.

"It's nothing, Trot; it's nothing. There will be no more of it. You shall know by and by. Now, Agnes, my dear, let us attend to these affairs."

"I must do Mr. Micawber the justice to say," Traddles began, "that although he would appear not to have worked to any good account for himself, he is a most untiring man when he works for other people. I never saw such a fellow. If he always goes on in the same way, he must be, virtually, about two hundred years old at present. The heat into which he has been continually putting himself; and the distracted and impetuous manner in which he has been diving, day and night, among papers and books; to say nothing of the immense number of letters he has written me between this house and Mr. Wickfield's, and often across the table when he has been sitting opposite, and might much more easily have spoken; is quite extraordinary."

"Letters!" cried my aunt. "I believe he dreams in letters!"

"There's Mr. Dick, too," said Traddles, "has been

doing wonders! As soon as he was released from overlooking Uriah Heep, whom he kept in such charge as *I* never saw exceeded, he began to devote himself to Mr. Wickfield. And really his anxiety to be of use in the investigations we have been making, and his real usefulness in extracting, and copying, and feteling, and carrying, have been quite stimulating to us."

"Dick is a very remarkable man," exclaimed my aunt; "and I always said he was. Trot, you know it!"

"I am happy to say, Miss Wickfield," pursued Traddles, at once with great delicacy and with great earnestness, "that in your absence Mr. Wickfield has considerably improved. Relieved of the incubus that had fastened upon him for so long a time, and of the dreadful apprehensions under which he had lived, he is hardly the same person. At times, even his impaired power of concentrating his memory and attention on particular points of business has recovered itself very much; and he has been able to assist us in making some things clear, that we should have found very difficult indeed, if not hopeless, without him. But what I have to do is to come to results; which are short enough; not to gossip on all the hopeful circumstances I have observed, or I shall never have done."

His natural manner and agreeable simplicity made it transparent that he said this to put us in good heart, and to enable Agnes to hear her father mentioned with greater confidence; but it was not the less pleasant for that.

"Now, let me see," said Traddles, looking among the papers on the table. "Having counted our

funds, and reduced to order a great mass of unintentional confusion in the first place, and of wilful confusion and falsification in the second, we take it to be clear that Mr. Wickfield might now wind up his business, and his agency trust, and exhibit no deficiency or defalcation whatever."

"Oh, thank Heaven!" cried Agnes fervently.

"But," said Traddles, "the surplus that would be left as his means of support — and I suppose the house to be sold, even in saying this — would be so small, not exceeding, in all probability, some hundreds of pounds, that perhaps, Miss Wickfield, it would be best to consider whether he might not retain his agency of the estate to which he has so long been receiver. His friends might advise him, you know; now he is free. You yourself, Miss Wickfield — Copperfield — I —"

"I have considered it, Trotwood," said Agnes, looking to me, "and I feel that it ought not to be, and must not be; even on the recommendation of a friend to whom I am so grateful, and owe so much."

"I will not say that I recommend it," observed Traddles. "I think it right to suggest it. No more."

"I am happy to hear you say so," answered Agnes steadily, "for it gives me hope, almost assurance, that we think alike. Dear Mr. Traddles, and dear Trotwood, papa once free with honor, what could I wish for? I have always aspired, if I could have released him from the toils in which he was held, to render back some little portion of the love and care I owe him, and to devote my life to him. It has been, for years, the utmost height of my hopes. To take our future on myself will be the next great

happiness — the next to his release from all trust and responsibility — that I can know.”

“Have you thought how, Agnes?”

“Often! I am not afraid, dear Trotwood. I am certain of success. So many people know me here, and think kindly of me, that I am certain. Don’t mistrust me. Our wants are not many. If I rent the dear old house, and keep a school, I shall be useful and happy.”

The calm fervor of her cheerful voice brought back so vividly, first the dear old house itself, and then my solitary home, that my heart was too full for speech. Traddles pretended for a little while to be busily looking among the papers.

“Next, Miss Trotwood,” said Traddles, “that property of yours.”

“Well, sir,” sighed my aunt, “all I have got to say about it is, that if it’s gone, I can bear it; and if it’s not gone, I shall be glad to get it back.”

“It was originally, I think, eight thousand pounds, Consols?” said Traddles.

“Right!” replied my aunt.

“I can’t account for more than five,” said Traddles with an air of perplexity.

“— Thousand, do you mean?” inquired my aunt with uncommon composure, “or pounds?”

“Five thousand pounds,” said Traddles.

“It was all there was,” returned my aunt. “I sold three myself. One I paid for your articles, Trot, my dear; and the other two I have by me. When I lost the rest, I thought it wise to say nothing about that sum, but to keep it secretly for a rainy day. I wanted to see how you would come out of the trial, Trot; and you came out nobly —

persevering, self-reliant, self-denying! So did Dick. Don't speak to me, for I find my nerves a little shaken!"

Nobody would have thought so, to see her sitting upright, with her arms folded; but she had wonderful self-command.

"Then I am delighted to say," cried Traddles, beaming with joy, "that we have recovered the whole money!"

"Don't congratulate me, anybody!" exclaimed my aunt. "How so, sir?"

"You believed it had been misappropriated by Mr. Wickfield?" said Traddles.

"Of course I did," said my aunt, "and was therefore easily silenced. Agnes, not a word!"

"And, indeed," said Traddles, "it was sold, by virtue of the power of management he held from you; but I needn't say by whom sold, or on whose actual signature. It was afterwards pretended to Mr. Wickfield, by that rascal, — and proved, too, by figures, — that he had possessed himself of the money (on general instructions, *he* said) to keep other deficiencies and difficulties from the light. Mr. Wickfield, being so weak and helpless in his hands as to pay you, afterwards, several sums of interest on a pretended principal which he knew did not exist, made himself, unhappily, a party to the fraud."

"And at last took the blame upon himself," added my aunt; "and wrote me a mad letter, charging himself with robbery, and wrong unheard of. Upon which I paid him a visit early one morning, called for a candle, burnt the letter, and told him, if he ever could right me and himself, to do it; and if he

couldn't, to keep his own counsel for his daughter's sake. — If anybody speaks to me, I'll leave the house ! ”

We all remained quiet ; Agnes covering her face.

“ Well, my dear friend,” said my aunt after a pause, “ and you have really extorted the money back from him ? ”

“ Why, the fact is,” returned Traddles, “ Mr. Micawber had so completely hemmed him in, and was always ready with so many new points if an old one failed, that he could not escape from us. A most remarkable circumstance is, that I really don't think he grasped this sum even so much for the gratification of his avarice, which was inordinate, as in the hatred he felt for Copperfield. He said so to me plainly. He said he would even have spent as much to balk or injure Copperfield.”

“ Ha ! ” said my aunt, knitting her brows thoughtfully, and glancing at Agnes. “ And what's become of him ? ”

“ I don't know. He left here,” said Traddles, “ with his mother, who had been clamoring, and beseeching, and disclosing the whole time. They went away by one of the London night coaches, and I know no more about him ; except that his malevolence to me at parting was audacious. He seemed to consider himself hardly less indebted to me than to Mr. Micawber ; which I consider (as I told him) quite a compliment.”

“ Do you suppose he has any money, Traddles ? ” I asked.

“ Oh dear yes, I should think so.” he replied, shaking his head seriously. “ I should say he must have pocketed a good deal, in one way or other.

But, I think you would find, Copperfield, if you had an opportunity of observing his course, that money would never keep that man out of mischief. He is such an incarnate hypocrite, that whatever object he pursues, he must pursue crookedly. It's his only compensation for the outward restraints he puts upon himself. Always creeping along the ground to some small end or other, he will always magnify every object in the way; and consequently will hate and suspect everybody that comes, in the most innocent manner, between him and it. So, the crooked courses will become crookeder, at any moment, for the least reason or for none. It's only necessary to consider his history here," said Traddles, "to know that."

"He's a monster of meanness!" said my aunt.

"Really I don't know about that," observed Traddles thoughtfully. "Many people can be very mean, when they give their minds to it."

"And now, touching Mr. Micawber," said my aunt.

"Well, really," said Traddles cheerfully, "I must, once more, give Mr. Micawber high praise. But for his having been so patient and persevering for so long a time, we never could have hoped to do anything worth speaking of. And I think we ought to consider that Mr. Micawber did right for right's sake, when we reflect what terms he might have made with Uriah Heep himself, for his silence."

"I think so too," said I.

"Now, what would you give him?" inquired my aunt.

"Oh! Before you come to that," said Traddles, a little disconcerted, "I am afraid I thought it dis-

erect to omit (not being able to carry everything before me) two points in making this lawless adjustment — for it's perfectly lawless from beginning to end — of a difficult affair. Those I. O. U.'s, and so forth, which Mr. Micawber gave him for the advances he had — ”

“ Well! They must be paid,” said my aunt.

“ Yes, but I don't know when they may be proceeded on, or where they are,” rejoined Traddles, opening his eyes; “ and I anticipate that, between this time and his departure, Mr. Micawber will be constantly arrested, or taken in execution.”

“ Then he must be constantly set free again, and taken out of execution,” said my aunt. “ What's the amount altogether ? ”

“ Why, Mr. Micawber has entered the transactions — he calls them transactions — with great form, in a book,” rejoined Traddles, smiling; “ and he makes the amount a hundred and three pounds, five.”

“ Now, what shall we give him, that sum included ? ” said my aunt. “ Agnes, my dear, you and I can talk about division of it afterwards. What should it be ? Five hundred pounds ? ”

Upon this, Traddles and I both struck in at once. We both recommended a small sum in money, and the payment, without stipulation to Mr. Micawber, of the Uriah claims as they came in. We proposed that the family should have their passage and their outfit, and a hundred pounds; and that Mr. Micawber's arrangement for the repayment of the advances should be gravely entered into, as it might be wholesome for him to suppose himself under that responsibility. To this I added the suggestion, that I should give some explanation of his character and

history to Mr. Peggotty, who I knew could be relied on; and that to Mr. Peggotty should be quietly intrusted the discretion of advancing another hundred. I further proposed to interest Mr. Micawber in Mr. Peggotty, by confiding so much of Mr. Peggotty's story to him as I might feel justified in relating, or might think expedient; and to endeavor to bring each of them to bear upon the other, for the common advantage. We all entered warmly into these views; and I may mention at once that the principals themselves did so, shortly afterwards, with perfect good will and harmony.

Seeing that Traddles now glanced anxiously at my aunt again, I reminded him of the second and last point to which he had adverted.

"You and your aunt will excuse me, Copperfield, if I touch upon a painful theme, as I greatly fear I shall," said Traddles, hesitating; "but I think it necessary to bring it to your recollection. On the day of Mr. Micawber's memorable denunciation, a threatening allusion was made by Uriah Heep to your aunt's — husband."

My aunt, retaining her stiff position, and apparent composure, assented with a nod.

"Perhaps," observed Traddles, "it was mere purposeless impertinence?"

"No," returned my aunt.

"There was — pardon me — really such a person, and at all in his power?" hinted Traddles.

"Yes, my good friend," said my aunt.

Traddles, with a perceptible lengthening of his face, explained that he had not been able to approach this subject; that it had shared the fate of Mr. Micawber's liabilities, in not being compre-

hended in the terms he had made ; that we were no longer of any authority with Uriah Heep ; and that if he could do us, or any of us, any injury or annoyance, no doubt he would.

My aunt remained quiet ; until again some stray tears found their way to her cheeks.

"You are quite right," she said. "It was very thoughtful to mention it."

"Can I — or Copperfield — do anything ?" asked Traddles gently.

"Nothing," said my aunt. "I thank you many times. Trot, my dear, a vain threat ! Let us have Mr. and Mrs. Micawber back. And don't any of you speak to me !" With that she smoothed her dress, and sat, with her upright carriage, looking at the door.

"Well, Mr. and Mrs. Micawber !" said my aunt when they entered. "We have been discussing your emigration, with many apologies to you for keeping you out of the room so long ; and I'll tell you what arrangements we propose."

These she explained to the unbounded satisfaction of the family, — children and all being then present, — and so much to the awakening of Mr. Micawber's punctual habits in the opening stage of all bill transactions, that he could not be dissuaded from immediately rushing out, in the highest spirits, to buy the stamps for his notes of hand. But, his joy received a sudden check ; for, within five minutes, he returned in the custody of a sheriff's officer, informing us, in a flood of tears, that all was lost. We, being quite prepared for this event, which was of course a proceeding of Uriah Heep's, soon paid the money ; and in five minutes more Mr. Micawber

was seated at the table, filling up the stamps with an expression of perfect joy, which only that congenial employment, or the making of punch, could impart in full completeness to his shining face. To see him at work on the stamps, with the relish of an artist, touching them like pictures, looking at them sideways, taking weighty notes of dates and amounts in his pocket-book, and contemplating them, when finished, with a high sense of their precious value, was a sight indeed.

"Now, the best thing you can do, sir, if you'll allow me to advise you," said my aunt, after silently observing him, "is to abjure that occupation for evermore."

"Madam," replied Mr. Micawber, "it is my intention to register such a vow on the virgin page of the future. Mrs. Micawber will attest it. I trust," said Mr. Micawber solemnly, "that my son Wilkins will ever bear in mind that he had infinitely better put his fist in the fire than use it to handle the serpents that have poisoned the life-blood of his unhappy parent!" Deeply affected, and changed in a moment to the image of despair, Mr. Micawber regarded the serpents with a look of gloomy abhorrence (in which his late admiration of them was not quite subdued), folded them up, and put them in his pocket.

This closed the proceedings of the evening. We were weary with sorrow and fatigue, and my aunt and I were to return to London on the morrow. It was arranged that the Micawbers should follow us, after effecting a sale of their goods to a broker; that Mr. Wickfield's affairs should be brought to a settlement, with all convenient speed, under the di-

rection of Traddles; and that Agnes should also come to London, pending those arrangements. We passed the night at the old house, which, freed from the presence of the Heeps, seemed purged of a disease; and I lay in my old room, like a shipwrecked wanderer come home.

We went back next day to my aunt's house — not to mine; and when she and I sat alone, as of old, before going to bed, she said, —

“Trot, do you really wish to know what I have had upon my mind lately?”

“Indeed I do, aunt. If there ever was a time when I felt unwilling that you should have a sorrow or anxiety which I could not share, it is now.”

“You have had sorrow enough, child,” said my aunt affectionately, “without the addition of *my* little miseries. I could have no other motive, Trot, in keeping anything from you.”

“I know that well,” said I. “But tell me now.”

“Would you ride with me a little way to-morrow morning?” asked my aunt.

“Of course.”

“At nine,” said she. “I’ll tell you then, my dear.”

At nine, accordingly, we went out in a little chariot, and drove to London. We drove a long way through the streets, until we came to one of the large hospitals. Standing hard by the building was a plain hearse. The driver recognized my aunt, and, in obedience to a motion of her hand at the window, drove slowly off; we following.

“You understand it now, Trot,” said my aunt. “He is gone!”

“Did he die in the hospital?”

"Yes."

She sat immovable beside me ; but, again I saw the stray tears on her face.

"He was there once before," said my aunt presently. "He was ailing a long time—a shattered, broken man, these many years. When he knew his state in this last illness, he asked them to send for me. He was sorry then. Very sorry."

"You went, I know, aunt."

"I went. I was with him a good deal afterwards."

"He died the night before we went to Canterbury ?" said I.

My aunt nodded. "No one can harm him now," she said. "It was a vain threat."

We drove away, out of town, to the churchyard at Hornsey. "Better here than in the streets," said my aunt. "He was born here."

We alighted; and followed the plain coffin to a corner I remember well, where the service was read consigning it to the dust.

"Six and thirty years ago, this day, my dear," said my aunt, as we walked back to the chariot, "I was married. God forgive us all !"

We took our seats in silence; and so she sat beside me for a long time, holding my hand. At length she suddenly burst into tears, and said, —

"He was a fine-looking man when I married him, Trot — and he was sadly changed !"

It did not last long. After the relief of tears, she soon became composed, and even cheerful. Her nerves were a little shaken, she said, or she would not have given way to it. God forgive us all !

So we rode back to her little cottage at Highgate, where we found the following short note,

which had arrived by that morning's post from Mr. Micawber:

"CANTERBURY, *Friday*.

"MY DEAR MADAM, AND COPPERFIELD, — The fair land of promise lately looming on the horizon is again enveloped in impenetrable mists, and forever withdrawn from the eyes of a drifting wretch whose Doom is sealed!

"Another writ has been issued (in his Majesty's High Court of King's Bench at Westminster), in another cause of *HEEP v. MICAWBER*, and the defendant in that cause is the prey of the sheriff having legal jurisdiction in this bailiwick.

' Now's the day, and now's the hour,
See the front of battle lower,
See approach proud EDWARD's power —
Chains and slavery !'

Consigned to which, and to a speedy end (for mental torture is not supportable beyond a certain point, and that point I feel I have attained), my course is run. Bless you, bless you! Some future traveller, visiting, from motives of curiosity, not unmingled, let us hope, with sympathy, the place of confinement allotted to debtors in this city, may, and I trust will, Ponder, as he traces on its wall, inscribed with a rusty nail,

"The obscure initials,

"W. M.

"P.S. I reopen this to say that our common friend, Mr. Thomas Traddles (who has not yet left us, and is looking extremely well), has paid the debt and costs, in the noble name of Miss Trotwood; and that myself and family are at the height of earthly bliss."

CHAPTER XVI.

TEMPEST.

I now approach an event in my life, so indelible, so awful, so bound by an infinite variety of ties to all that has preceded it in these pages, that, from the beginning of my narrative, I have seen it growing larger and larger as I advanced, like a great tower in a plain, and throwing its forecast shadow even on the incidents of my childish days.

For years after it occurred, I dreamed of it often. I have started up so vividly impressed by it, that its fury has yet seemed raging in my quiet room, in the still night. I dream of it sometimes, though at lengthened and uncertain intervals, to this hour. I have an association between it and a stormy wind, or the lightest mention of a seashore, as strong as any of which my mind is conscious. As plainly as I behold what happened, I will try to write it down. I do not recall it, but see it done; for it happens again before me.

The time drawing on rapidly for the sailing of the emigrant ship, my good old nurse (almost broken-hearted for me, when we first met) came up to London. I was constantly with her, and her brother, and the Micawbers (they being very much together); but Emily I never saw.

One evening, when the time was close at hand, I was alone with Peggotty and her brother. Our conversation turned on Ham. She described to us how tenderly he had taken leave of her, and how manfully and quietly he had borne himself. Most of all, of late, when she believed he was most tried. It was a subject of which the affectionate creature never tired; and our interest in hearing the many examples which she, who was so much with him, had to relate, was equal to hers in relating them.

My aunt and I were at that time vacating the two cottages at Highgate; I intending to go abroad, and she to return to her house at Dover. We had a temporary lodging in Covent Garden. As I walked home to it, after this evening's conversation, reflecting on what had passed between Ham and myself when I was last at Yarmouth, I wavered in the original purpose I had formed of leaving a letter for Emily when I should take leave of her uncle on board the ship, and thought it would be better to write to her now. She might desire, I thought, after receiving my communication, to send some parting word by me to her unhappy lover. I ought to give her the opportunity.

I therefore sat down in my room, before going to bed, and wrote to her. I told her that I had seen him, and that he had requested me to tell her what I have already written in its place in these sheets. I faithfully repeated it. I had no need to enlarge upon it, if I had had the right. Its deep fidelity and goodness were not to be adorned by me or any man. I left it out to be sent round in the morning; with a line to Mr. Peggotty, requesting him to give it to her; and went to bed at daybreak.

I was weaker than I knew then ; and, not falling asleep until the sun was up, lay late, and unrefreshed, next day. I was roused by the silent presence of my aunt at my bedside. I felt it in my sleep, as I suppose we all do feel such things.

"Trot, my dear," she said when I opened my eyes, "I couldn't make up my mind to disturb you. Mr. Peggotty is here ; shall he come up ?"

I replied yes, and he soon appeared.

"Mas'r Davy," he said when we had shaken hands, "I giv' Em'ly your letter, sir, and she writ this heer ; and begged of me fur to ask you to read it and if you see no hurt in't, to be so kind as take charge on't."

"Have you read it ?" said I.

He nodded sorrowfully. I opened it, and read as follows, —

"I have got your message. Oh, what can I write, to thank you for your good and blessed kindness to me ?

"I have put the words close to my heart. I shall keep them till I die. They are sharp thorns, but they are such comfort. I have prayed over them, oh, I have prayed so much ! When I find what you are, and what uncle is, I think what God must be, and can cry to him.

"Good-by for ever. Now, my dear, my friend, good-by for ever in this world. In another world, if I am forgiven, I may wake a child, and come to you. All thanks and blessings. Farewell, evermore."

This, blotted with tears, was the letter.

"May I tell her as you doesn't see no hurt in't, and as you'll be so kind as take charge on't, Mas'r Davy ?" said Mr. Peggotty when I had read it.

"Unquestionably," said I — "but I am thinking —"

"Yes, Mas'r Davy?"

"I am thinking," said I, "that I'll go down again to Yarmouth. There's time, and to spare, for me to go and come back before the ship sails. My mind is constantly running on him in his solitude; to put this letter of her writing in his hand at this time, and to enable you to tell her, in the moment of parting, that he has got it, will be a kindness to both of them. I solemnly accepted his commission, dear good fellow, and cannot discharge it too completely. The journey is nothing to me. I am restless, and shall be better in motion. I'll go down to-night."

Though he anxiously endeavored to dissuade me, I saw that he was of my mind; and this, if I had required to be confirmed in my intention, would have had the effect. He went round to the coach-office, at my request, and took the box seat for me on the mail. In the evening I started, by that conveyance, down the road I had traversed under so many vicissitudes.

"Don't you think that," I asked the coachman, in the first stage out of London, "a very remarkable sky? I don't remember to have seen one like it."

"Nor I — not equal to it," he replied. "That's wind, sir. There'll be mischief done at sea, I expect, before long."

It was a murky confusion — here and there blotted with a color like the color of the smoke from damp fuel — of flying clouds tossed up into most remarkable heaps, suggesting greater heights in the clouds than there were depths below them to the bottom of the deepest hollows in the earth, through which the wild moon seemed to plunge headlong, as if, in a dread disturbance of the laws of nature, she had

lost her way and were frightened. There had been a wind all day ; and it was rising, then, with an extraordinarily great sound. In another hour it had much increased, and the sky was more overcast, and it blew hard.

But, as the night advanced, the clouds closing in and densely overspreading the whole sky, then very dark, it came on to blow harder and harder. It still increased, until our horses could scarcely face the wind. Many times, in the dark part of the night (it was then late in September, when the nights were not short), the leaders turned about, or came to a dead stop ; and we were often in serious apprehension that the coach would be blown over. Sweeping gusts of rain came up before this storm like showers of steel ; and at those times, when there was any shelter of trees or lee walls to be got, we were fain to stop, in a sheer impossibility of continuing the struggle.

When the day broke, it blew harder and harder. I had been in Yarmouth when the seamen said it blew great guns, but I had never known the like of this, or anything approaching to it. We came to Ipswich — very late, having had to fight every inch of ground since we were ten miles out of London : and found a cluster of people in the market-place, who had risen from their beds in the night, fearful of falling chimneys. Some of these, congregating about the inn yard while we changed horses, told us of great sheets of lead having been ripped off a high church tower, and flung into a by-street, which they then blocked up. Others had to tell of country-people, coming in from neighboring villages, who had seen great trees lying torn out of the earth, and

whole ricks scattered about the roads and fields. Still, there was no abatement in the storm, but it blew harder.

As we struggled on, nearer and nearer to the sea, from which this mighty wind was blowing dead on shore, its force became more and more terrific. Long before we saw the sea, its spray was on our lips, and showered salt rain upon us. The water was out, over miles and miles of the flat country adjacent to Yarmouth: and every sheet and puddle lashed its banks, and had its stress of little breakers setting heavily towards us. When we came within sight of the sea, the waves on the horizon, caught at intervals above the rolling abyss, were like glimpses of another shore with towers and buildings. When at last we got into the town, the people came out to their doors, all aslant, and with streaming hair, making a wonder of the mail that had come through such a night.

I put up at the old inn, and went down to look at the sea; staggering along the street, which was strewn with sand and seaweed, and with flying blotches of sea foam; afraid of falling slates and tiles; and holding by people I met at angry corners. Coming near the beach, I saw, not only the boatmen, but half the people of the town, lurking behind buildings; some, now and then braving the fury of the storm to look away to sea, and blown sheer out of their course in trying to get zigzag back.

Joining these groups, I found bewailing women, whose husbands were away in herring or oyster boats, which there was too much reason to think might have foundered before they could run in anywhere for safety. Grizzled old sailors were among

the people, shaking their heads as they looked from water to sky, and muttering to one another; ship-owners, excited and uneasy; children huddling together, and peering into older faces; even stout mariners, disturbed and anxious, levelling their glasses at the sea from behind places of shelter, as if they were surveying an enemy.

The tremendous sea itself, when I could find sufficient pause to look at it, in the agitation of the blinding wind, the flying stones and sand, and the awful noise, confounded me. As the high watery walls came rolling in, and, at their highest, tumbled into surf, they looked as if the least would engulf the town. As the receding wave swept back with a hoarse roar, it seemed to scoop out deep caves in the beach, as if its purpose were to undermine the earth. When some white-headed billows thundered on, and dashed themselves to pieces before they reached the land, every fragment of the late whole seemed possessed by the full might of its wrath, rushing to be gathered to the composition of another monster. Undulating hills were changed to valleys, undulating valleys (with a solitary storm-bird sometimes skimming through them) were lifted up to hills; masses of water shivered and shook the beach with a booming sound; every shape tumultuously rolled on, as soon as made, to change its shape and place, and beat another shape and place away; the ideal shore on the horizon, with its towers and buildings, rose and fell; the clouds flew fast and thick; I seemed to see a rending and upheaving of all nature.

Not finding Ham among the people whom this memorable wind — for it is still remembered down there as the greatest ever known to blow upon that

coast — had brought together, I made my way to his house. It was shut ; and, as no one answered to my knocking, I went by back-ways and by-lanes to the yard where he worked. I learned, there, that he had gone to Lowestoft, to meet some sudden exigency of ship-repairing in which his skill was required ; but that he would be back to-morrow morning in good time.

I went back to the inn ; and when I had washed and dressed, and tried to sleep, but in vain, it was five o'clock in the afternoon. I had not sat five minutes by the coffee-room fire, when the waiter coming to stir it, as an excuse for talking, told me that two colliers had gone down, with all hands, a few miles away ; and that some other ships had been seen laboring hard in the Roads, and trying, in great distress, to keep off shore. Mercy on them, and on all poor sailors, said he, if we had another night like the last !

I was very much depressed in spirits ; very solitary ; and felt an uneasiness in Ham's not being there, disproportionate to the occasion. I was seriously affected, without knowing how much, by late events ; and my long exposure to the fierce wind had confused me. There was that jumble in my thoughts and recollections, that I had lost the clear arrangement of time and distance. Thus, if I had gone out into the town, I should not have been surprised, I think, to encounter some one who I knew must be then in London. So to speak, there was in these respects a curious inattention in my mind. Yet it was busy, too, with all the remembrances the place naturally awakened ; and they were particularly distinct and vivid.

In this state, the waiter's dismal intelligence about the ships immediately connected itself, without any effort of my volition, with my uneasiness about Ham. I was persuaded that I had an apprehension of his returning from Lowestoft by sea, and being lost. This grew so strong with me, that I resolved to go back to the yard before I took my dinner, and ask the boat-builder if he thought his attempting to return by sea at all likely. If he gave me the least reason to think so, I would go over to Lowestoft, and prevent it by bringing him with me.

I hastily ordered my dinner, and went back to the yard. I was none too soon; for the boat-builder, with a lantern in his hand, was locking the yard-gate. He quite laughed when I asked him the question, and said there was no fear; no man in his senses, or out of them, would put off in such a gale of wind, least of all Ham Peggotty, who had been born to seafaring.

So sensible of this, beforehand, that I had really felt ashamed of doing what I was nevertheless impelled to do, I went back to the inn. If such a wind could rise, I think it was rising. The howl and roar, the rattling of the doors and windows, the rumbling in the chimneys, the apparent rocking of the very house that sheltered me, and the prodigious tumult of the sea, were more fearful than in the morning. But there was now a great darkness besides; and that invested the storm with new terrors, real and fanciful.

I could not eat, I could not sit still, I could not continue steadfast to anything. Something within me, faintly answering to the storm without, tossed

up the depths of my memory, and made a tumult in them. Yet, in all the hurry of my thoughts, wild running with the thundering sea, — the storm, and my uneasiness regarding Ham, were always in the foreground.

My dinner went away almost untasted, and I tried to refresh myself with a glass or two of wine. In vain. I fell into a dull slumber before the fire, without losing my consciousness, either of the uproar out of doors, or of the place in which I was. Both became overshadowed by a new and indefinable horror; and when I awoke — or rather, when I shook off the lethargy that bound me in my chair — my whole frame thrilled with objectless and unintelligible fear.

I walked to and fro, tried to read an old gazetteer, listened to the awful noises: looked at faces, scenes, and figures in the fire. At length, the steady ticking of the undisturbed clock on the wall tormented me to that degree that I resolved to go to bed.

It was reassuring, on such a night, to be told that some of the inn servants had agreed together to sit up until morning. I went to bed exceedingly weary and heavy; but, on my lying down, all such sensations vanished, as if by magic, and I was broad awake, with every sense refined.

For hours I lay there, listening to the wind and water; imagining, now, that I heard shrieks out at sea; now, that I distinctly heard the firing of signal guns; and now, the fall of houses in the town. I got up several times, and looked out; but could see nothing, except the reflection in the window panes of the faint candle I had left burning, and of my

own haggard face looking in at me from the black void.

At length, my restlessness attained to such a pitch, that I hurried on my clothes, and went downstairs. In the large kitchen, where I dimly saw bacon and ropes of onions hanging from the beams, the watchers were clustered together, in various attitudes, about a table, purposely moved away from the great chimney, and brought near the door. A pretty girl, who had her ears stopped with her apron, and her eyes upon the door, screamed when I appeared, supposing me to be a spirit; but the others had more presence of mind, and were glad of an addition to their company. One man, referring to the topic they had been discussing, asked me whether I thought the souls of the collier crews who had gone down were out in the storm.

I remained there, I dare say, two hours. Once I opened the yard gate, and looked into the empty street. The sand, the seaweed, and the flakes of foam were driving by, and I was obliged to call for assistance before I could shut the gate again, and make it fast against the wind.

There was a dark gloom in my solitary chamber, when I at length returned to it; but I was tired now, and, getting into bed again, fell — off a tower and down a precipice — into the depths of sleep. I have an impression that for a long time, though I dreamed of being elsewhere and in a variety of scenes, it was always blowing in my dream. At length I lost that feeble hold upon reality, and was engaged with two dear friends, but who they were I don't know, at the siege of some town in a roar of cannonading.

The thunder of the cannon was so loud and incessant, that I could not hear something I much desired to hear, until I made a great exertion and awoke. It was broad day — eight or nine o'clock; the storm raging, in lieu of the batteries; and some one knocking and calling at my door.

"What is the matter?" I cried.

"A wreck! Close by!"

I sprang out of bed and asked what wreck?

"A schooner, from Spain or Portugal, laden with fruit and wine. Make haste, sir, if you want to see her! It's thought, down on the beach, she'll go to pieces every moment."

The excited voice went clamoring along the staircase; and I wrapped myself in my clothes as quickly as I could, and ran into the street.

Numbers of people were there before me, all running in one direction, to the beach. I ran the same way, outstripping a good many, and soon came facing the wild sea.

The wind might by this time have lulled a little, though not more sensibly than if the cannonading I had dreamed of had been diminished by the silencing of half a dozen guns out of hundreds. But, the sea, having upon it the additional agitation of the whole night, was infinitely more terrific than when I had seen it last. Every appearance it had then presented bore the expression of being *swelled*; and the height to which the breakers rose, and, looking over one another, bore one another down, and rolled in, in interminable hosts, was most appalling.

In the difficulty of hearing anything but wind and waves, and in the crowd, and the unspeakable con-

fusion, and my first breathless efforts to stand against the weather, I was so confused that I looked out to sea for the wreck, and saw nothing but the foaming heads of the great waves. A half-dressed boatman, standing next me, pointed with his bare arm (a tattooed arrow on it, pointing in the same direction) to the left. Then, O great Heaven, I saw it, close in upon us !

One mast was broken short off, six or eight feet from the deck, and lay over the side, entangled in a maze of sail and rigging; and all that ruin, as the ship rolled and beat — which she did without a moment's pause, and with a violence quite inconceivable — beat the side as if it would stave it in. Some efforts were even then being made to cut this portion of the wreck away ; for, as the ship, which was broadside on, turned towards us in her rolling, I plainly descried her people at work with axes, especially one active figure with long curling hair, conspicuous among the rest. But, a great cry, which was audible even above the wind and water, rose from the shore at this moment ; the sea, sweeping over the rolling wreck, made a clean breach, and carried men, spars, casks, planks, bulwarks, heaps of such toys, into the boiling surge.

The second mast was yet standing, with the rags of a rent sail, and a wild confusion of broken cordage flapping to and fro. The ship had struck once, the same boatman hoarsely said in my ear, and then lifted in and struck again. I understood him to add that she was parting amidships, and I could readily suppose so, for the rolling and beating were too tremendous for any human work to suffer long. As he spoke, there was another great cry of pity

from the beach; four men arose with the wreck out of the deep, elinging to the rigging of the remaining mast; uppermost, the active figure with the curling hair.

There was a bell on board; and as the ship rolled and dashed, like a desperate creature driven mad, now showing us the whole sweep of her deck, as she turned on her beam ends towards the shore, now nothing but her keel, as she sprung wildly over and turned towards the sea, the bell rang; and its sound, the knell of those unhappy men, was borne towards us on the wind. Again we lost her, and again she rose. Two men were gone. The agony on shore increased. Men groaned, and clasped their hands; women shrieked, and turned away their faces. Some ran wildly up and down along the beach, crying for help where no help could be. I found myself one of these, frantically imploring a knot of sailors whom I knew, not to let those two lost creatures perish before our eyes.

They were making out to me, in an agitated way — I don't know how, for the little I could hear I was scarcely composed enough to understand — that the life-boat had been bravely manned an hour ago, and could do nothing; and that, as no man would be so desperate as to attempt to wade off with a rope, and establish a communication with the shore, there was nothing left to try; when I noticed that some new sensation moved the people on the beach, and saw them part, and Ham come breaking through them to the front.

I ran to him — as well as I know, to repeat my appeal for help. But, distracted though I was by a

sight so new to me and terrible, the determination in his face, and his look out to sea — exactly the same look as I remembered in connection with the morning after Emily's flight — awoke me to a knowledge of his danger. I held him back with both arms; and implored the men with whom I had been speaking, not to listen to him, not to do murder, not to let him stir from off that sand!

Another cry arose on shore; and, looking to the wreck, we saw the cruel sail, with blow on blow, beat off the lower of the two men, and fly up in triumph round the active figure left alone upon the mast.

Against such a sight, and against such determination as that of the calmly desperate man who was already accustomed to lead half the people present, I might as hopefully have entreated the wind. "Mas'r Davy," he said, cheerily grasping me by both hands, "if my time is come, 'tis come. If 'tan't, I'll bide it. Lord above bless you, and bless all! Mates, make me ready! I'm a-going off!"

I was swept away, but not unkindly, to some distance, where the people around me made me stay; urging, as I confusedly perceived, that he was bent on going, with help or without, and that I should endanger the precautions for his safety by troubling those with whom they rested. I don't know what I answered, or what they rejoined; but, I saw hurry on the beach, and men running with ropes from a capstan that was there, and penetrating into a circle of figures that hid him from me. Then I saw him standing alone, in a seaman's frock and trousers: a rope in his hand, or slung to his wrist: another round his body: and several of the best

men holding, at a little distance, to the latter, which he laid out himself, slack upon the shore, at his feet.

The wreck, even to my unpractised eye, was breaking up. I saw that she was parting in the middle, and that the life of the solitary man upon the mast hung by a thread. Still, he clung to it. He had a singular red cap on — not like a sailor's cap, but of a finer color; and as the few yielding planks between him and destruction rolled and bulged, and his anticipative death-knell rung, he was seen by all of us to wave it. I saw him do it now, and thought I was going distracted, when his action brought an old remembrance to my mind of a once dear friend.

Ham watched the sea, standing alone, with the silence of suspended breath behind him, and the storm before, until there was a great retiring wave, when, with a backward glance at those who held the rope which was made fast round his body, he dashed in after it, and in a moment was buffeting with the water; rising with the hills, falling with the valleys, lost beneath the foam; then drawn again to land. They hauled in hastily.

He was hurt. I saw blood on his face, from where I stood; but he took no thought of that. He seemed hurriedly to give them some directions for leaving him more free — or so I judged from the motion of his arm — and was gone as before.

And now he made for the wreck, rising with the hills, falling with the valleys, lost beneath the rugged foam, borne in towards the shore, borne on towards the ship, striving hard and valiantly. The distance was nothing, but the power of the sea and

wind made the strife deadly. At length he neared the wreck. He was so near, that with one more of his vigorous strokes he would be clinging to it, when a high, green, vast hillside of water, moving on shoreward from beyond the ship, he seemed to leap up into it with a mighty bound, and the ship was gone !

Some eddying fragments I saw in the sea, as if a mere cask had been broken, in running to the spot where they were hauling in. Consternation was in every face. They drew him to my very feet — insensible — dead. He was carried to the nearest house ; and, no one preventing me now, I remained near him, busy, while every means of restoration was tried ; but he had been beaten to death by the great wave, and his generous heart was stilled forever.

As I sat beside the bed, when hope was abandoned and all was done, a fisherman, who had known me when Emily and I were children, and ever since, whispered my name at the door.

“Sir,” said he, with tears starting to his weather-beaten face, which, with his trembling lips, was ashy pale, “will you come over yonder ?”

The old remembrance that had been recalled to me was in his look. I asked him, terror-stricken, leaning on the arm he held out to support me, —

“Has a body come ashore ?”

He said, “Yes.”

“Do I know it ?” I asked then.

He answered nothing.

But he led me to the shore. And on that part of it where she and I had looked for shells, two children — on that part of it where some lighter frag-

ments of the old boat, blown down last night, had been scattered by the wind — among the ruins of the home he had wronged — I saw him lying with his head upon his arm, as I had often seen him lie at school.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE NEW WOUND, AND THE OLD.

No need, O Steerforth, to have said, when we last spoke together, in that hour which I so little deemed to be our parting hour—no need to have said, “Think of me at my best!” I had done that ever; and could I change now, looking on this sight?

They brought a hand-bier, and laid him on it, and covered him with a flag, and took him up and bore him on towards the houses. All the men who carried him had known him, and gone sailing with him, and seen him merry and bold. They carried him through the wild roar, a hush in the midst of all the tumult; and took him to the cottage where Death was already.

But, when they set the bier down on the thresh-old, they looked at one another, and at me, and whispered. I knew why. They felt as if it were not right to lay him down in the same quiet room.

We went into the town, and took our burden to the inn. So soon as I could at all collect my thoughts, I sent for Joram, and begged him to provide me a conveyance in which it could be got to London in the night. I knew that the care of it, and the hard duty of preparing his mother to receive

it, could only rest with me ; and I was anxious to discharge that duty as faithfully as I could.

I chose the night for the journey, that there might be less curiosity when I left the town. But, although it was nearly midnight when I came out of the yard in a chaise, followed by what I had in charge, there were many people waiting. At intervals, along the town, and even a little way out upon the road, I saw more ; but at length only the bleak night and the open country were around me, and the ashes of my youthful friendship.

Upon a mellow autumn day, about noon, when the ground was perfumed by fallen leaves, and many more, in beautiful tints of yellow, red, and brown, yet hung upon the trees, through which the sun was shining, I arrived at Highgate. I walked the last mile, thinking, as I went along, of what I had to do ; and left the carriage that had followed me all through the night, awaiting orders to advance.

The house, when I came up to it, looked just the same. Not a blind was raised : no sign of life was in the dull paved court, with its covered way leading to the disused door. The wind had quite gone down, and nothing moved.

I had not, at first, the courage to ring at the gate ; and, when I did ring, my errand seemed to me to be expressed in the very sound of the bell. The little parlor-maid came out, with the key in her hand ; and, looking earnestly at me as she unlocked the gate, said, —

“ I beg your pardon, sir. Are you ill ? ”

“ I have been much agitated, and am fatigued.”

“ Is anything the matter, sir ? — Mr. James ? — ”

“ Hush ! ” said I. “ Yes, something has happened

that I have to break to Mrs. Steerforth. She is at home ? ”

The girl anxiously replied that her mistress was very seldom out now, even in a carriage ; that she kept her room ; that she saw no company, but would see me. Her mistress was up, she said, and Miss Dartle was with her. What message should she take upstairs ?

Giving her a strict charge to be careful of her manner, and only to carry in my card and say I waited, I sat down in the drawing-room (which we had now reached) until she should come back. Its former pleasant air of occupation was gone, and the shutters were half closed. The harp had not been used for many and many a day. His picture, as a boy, was there. The cabinet in which his mother had kept his letters was there. I wondered if she ever read them now ; if she would ever read them more !

The house was so still, that I heard the girl's light step upstairs. On her return, she brought a message, to the effect that Mrs. Steerforth was an invalid, and could not come down ; but that, if I would excuse her being in her chamber, she would be glad to see me. In a few moments I stood before her.

She was in his room ; not in her own. I felt, of course, that she had taken to occupy it, in remembrance of him ; and that the many tokens of his old sports and accomplishments, by which she was surrounded, remained there, just as he had left them, for the same reason. She murmured, however, even in her reception of me, that she was out of her own chamber because its aspect was unsuited to her



infirmity; and with her stately look repelled the least suspicion of the truth.

At her chair, as usual, was Rosa Dartle. From the first moment of her dark eyes resting on me, I saw she knew I was the bearer of evil tidings. The sear sprung into view that instant. She withdrew herself a step behind the chair, to keep her own face out of Mrs. Steerforth's observation; and scrutinized me with a piercing gaze that never faltered, never shrunk.

"I am sorry to observe you are in mourning, sir," said Mrs. Steerforth.

"I am unhappily a widower," said I.

"You are very young to know so great a loss," she returned. "I am grieved to hear it. I am grieved to hear it. I hope Time will be good to you."

"I hope Time," said I, looking at her, "will be good to all of us. Dear Mrs. Steerforth, we must all trust to that in our heaviest misfortunes."

The earnestness of my manner, and the tears in my eyes, alarmed her. The whole course of her thoughts appeared to stop, and change.

I tried to command my voice in gently saying his name, but it trembled. She repeated it to herself, two or three times, in a low tone. Then, addressing me, she said, with enforced calmness, —

"My son is ill?"

"Very ill."

"You have seen him?"

"I have."

"Are you reconciled?"

I could not say Yes, I could not say No. She slightly turned her head towards the spot where

Rosa Dartle had been standing at her elbow, and in that moment I said, by the motion of my lips, to Rosa, "Dead!"

That Mrs. Steerforth might not be induced to look behind her, and read, plainly written, what she was not yet prepared to know, I met her look quickly; but I had seen Rosa Dartle throw her hands up in the air with vehemence of despair and horror, and then clasp them on her face.

The handsome lady—so like, oh, so like!—regarded me with a fixed look, and put her hand to her forehead. I besought her to be calm, and prepare herself to bear what I had to tell; but I should rather have entreated her to weep, for she sat like a stone figure.

"When I was last here," I faltered, "Miss Dartle told me he was sailing here and there. The night before last was a dreadful one at sea. If he were at sea that night, and near a dangerous coast, as it is said he was; and if the vessel that was seen should really be the ship which—"

"Rosa!" said Mrs. Steerforth, "come to me!"

She came, but with no sympathy or gentleness. Her eyes gleamed like fire as she confronted his mother, and broke into a frightful laugh.

"Now," she said, "is your pride appeased, you madwoman? *Now* has he made atonement to you—with his life? Do you hear?—His life!"

Mrs. Steerforth, fallen back stiffly in her chair, and making no sound but a moan, cast her eyes upon her with a wild stare.

"Ay!" cried Rosa, smiting herself passionately on the breast, "look at me! Moan, and groan, and look at me! Look here!" striking the scar, "at your dead child's handiwork!"

The moan the mother uttered, from time to time, went to my heart. Always the same. Always inarticulate and stifled. Always accompanied with an incapable motion of the head, but with no change of face. Always proceeding from a rigid mouth and closed teeth, as if the jaw were locked and the face frozen up in pain.

"Do you remember when he did this?" she proceeded. "Do you remember when, in his inheritance of your nature, and in your pampering of his pride and passion, he did this, and disfigured me for life? Look at me, marked until I die with his high displeasure; and moan and groan for what you made him!"

"Miss Dartle!" I entreated her. "For Heaven's sake —"

"I *will* speak!" she said, turning on me with her lightning eyes. "Be silent, you! Look at me, I say, proud mother of a proud, false son! Moan for your nurture of him, moan for your corruption of him, moan for your loss of him, moan for mine!"

She clenched her hand, and trembled through her spare worn figure, as if her passion were killing her by inches.

"You resent his self-will!" she exclaimed. "You injured by his haughty temper! You, who opposed to both, when your hair was gray, the qualities which made both when you gave him birth! You, who from his cradle reared him to be what he was, and stunted what he should have been! Are you rewarded, *now*, for your years of trouble?"

"Oh, Miss Dartle, shame! Oh, cruel!"

"I tell you," she returned, "I *will* speak to her! No power on earth should stop me while I was

standing here! Have I been silent all these years, and shall I not speak now? I loved him better than you ever loved him!" turning on her fiercely. "I could have loved him, and asked no return. If I had been his wife, I could have been the slave of his caprices for a word of love a year. I should have been. Who knows it better than I? You were exacting, proud, punctilious, selfish. My love would have been devoted — would have trod your paltry whimpering under foot!"

With flashing eyes, she stamped upon the ground as if she actually did it.

"Look here!" she said, striking the scar again with relentless hand. "When he grew into the better understanding of what he had done, he saw it, and repented of it! I could sing to him, and talk to him, and show the ardor that I felt in all he did, and attain with labor to such knowledge as most interested him; and I attracted him. When he was freshest and truest, he loved *me*. Yes, he did! Many a time, when you were put off with a slight word, he has taken *Me* to his heart!"

She said it with a taunting pride in the midst of her frenzy — for it was little less — yet with an eager remembrance of it, in which the smouldering embers of a gentler feeling kindled for the moment.

"I descended — as I might have known I should, but that he fascinated me with his boyish courtship — into a doll, a trifle for the occupation of an idle hour, to be dropped, and taken up, and trifled with, as the inconstant humor took him. When he grew weary, I grew weary. As his fancy died out, I would no more have tried to strengthen any power I had than I would have married him on his being

forced to take me for his wife. We fell away from one another without a word. Perhaps you saw it, and were not sorry. Since then, I have been a mere disfigured piece of furniture between you both; having no eyes, no ears, no feelings, no remembrances. Moan! Moan for what you made him; not for your love. I tell you that the time was when I loved him better than you ever did!"

She stood with her bright angry eyes confronting the wide stare, and the set face; and softened no more, when the moaning was repeated, than if the face had been a picture.

"Miss Dartle," said I, "if you can be so obdurate as not to feel for this afflicted mother —"

"Who feels for me?" she sharply retorted. "She has sown this. Let her moan for the harvest that she reaps to-day!"

"And if his faults —" I began.

"Faults!" she cried, bursting into passionate tears. "Who dares malign him? He had a soul worth millions of the friends to whom he stooped!"

"No one can have loved him better, no one can hold him in dearer remembrance, than I," I replied. "I meant to say, if you have no compassion for his mother; or if his faults — you have been bitter on them —"

"It's false!" she cried, tearing her black hair. "I loved him!"

"— Cannot," I went on, "be banished from your remembrance in such an hour; look at that figure, even as one you have never seen before, and render it some help!"

All this time the figure was unchanged, and looked unchangeable. Motionless, rigid, staring;

moaning in the same dumb way from time to time, with the same helpless motion of the head; but giving no other sign of life. Miss Dartle suddenly kneeled down before it, and began to loosen the dress.

"A curse upon you!" she said, looking round at me with a mingled expression of rage and grief. "It was in an evil hour that you ever came here! A curse upon you! Go!"

After passing out of the room, I hurried back to ring the bell, the sooner to alarm the servants. She had then taken the impassive figure in her arms, and, still upon her knees, was weeping over it, kissing it, calling to it, rocking it to and fro upon her bosom like a child, and trying every tender means to rouse the dormant senses. No longer afraid of leaving her, I noiselessly turned back again; and alarmed the house as I went out.

Later in the day I returned, and we laid him in his mother's room. She was just the same, they told me; Miss Dartle never left her; doctors were in attendance, many things had been tried; but she lay like a statue, except for the low sound now and then.

I went through the dreary house, and darkened the windows. The windows of the chamber where he lay, I darkened last. I lifted up the leaden hand, and held it to my heart, and all the world seemed death and silence, broken only by his mother's moaning.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE EMIGRANTS.

ONE thing more I had to do before yielding myself to the shock of these emotions. It was, to conceal what had occurred from those who were going away; and to dismiss them on their voyage in happy ignorance. In this no time was to be lost.

I took Mr. Micawber aside that same night, and confided to him the task of standing between Mr. Peggotty and the intelligence of the late catastrophe. He zealously undertook to do so, and to intercept any newspaper through which it might, without such precautions, reach him.

"If it penetrates to him, sir," said Mr. Micawber, striking himself on the breast, "it shall first pass through this body!"

Mr. Micawber, I must observe, in his adaptation of himself to a new state of society, had acquired a bold, buccaneering air, not absolutely lawless, but defensive and prompt. One might have supposed him a child of the wilderness, long accustomed to live out of the confines of civilization, and about to return to his native wilds.

He had provided himself, among other things,

with a complete suit of oil-skin, and a straw hat with a very low crown, pitched or calked on the outside. In this rough clothing, with a common mariner's telescope under his arm, and a shrewd trick of casting up his eye at the sky as if looking out for dirty weather, he was far more nautical, after his manner, than Mr. Peggotty. His whole family, if I may so express it, were cleared for action. I found Mrs. Micawber in the closest and most unpromising of bonnets, made fast under the chin; and in a shawl which tied her up (as I had been tied up, when my aunt first received me) like a bundle, and was secured behind at the waist, in a strong knot. Miss Micawber I found made snug for stormy weather in the same manner; with nothing superfluous about her. Master Micawber was hardly visible in a Guernsey shirt, and the shaggiest suit of slops I ever saw; and the children were done up, like preserved meats, in impervious cases. Both Mr. Micawber and his eldest son wore their sleeves loosely turned back at the wrists, as being ready to lend a hand in any direction, and to "tumble up," or sing out, "Yeo — Heave — Yeo!" on the shortest notice.

Thus Traddles and I found them at nightfall, assembled on the wooden steps, at that time known as Hungerford Stairs, watching the departure of a boat with some of their property on board. I had told Traddles of the terrible event, and it had greatly shocked him; but there could be no doubt of the kindness of keeping it a secret, and he had come to help me in this last service. It was here that I took Mr. Micawber aside, and received his promise.

The Micawber family were lodged in a little, dirty, tumble-down public-house, which in those days was close to the stairs, and whose protruding wooden rooms overhung the river. The family, as emigrants, being objects of some interest in and about Hungerford, attracted so many beholders, that we were glad to take refuge in their room. It was one of the wooden chambers upstairs, with the tide flowing underneath. My aunt and Agnes were there, busily making some little extra comforts, in the way of dress, for the children. Peggotty was quietly assisting, with the old insensible workbox, yard-measure, and a bit of wax candle before her, that had now outlived so much.

It was not easy to answer her inquiries; still less to whisper Mr. Peggotty, when Mr. Micawber brought him in, that I had given the letter, and all was well. But I did both, and made them happy. If I showed any trace of what I felt, my own sorrows were sufficient to account for it.

"And when does the ship sail, Mr. Micawber?" asked my aunt.

Mr. Micawber considered it necessary to prepare either my aunt or his wife by degrees, and said, sooner than he had expected yesterday.

"The boat brought you word, I suppose?" said my aunt.

"It did, ma'am," he returned.

"Well?" said my aunt. "And she sails—"

"Madam," he replied, "I am informed that we must positively be on board before seven to-morrow morning."

"Heyday!" said my aunt, "that's soon. Is it a sea-going fact, Mr. Peggotty?"

"'Tis so, ma'am. She'll drop down the river with that theer tide. If Mas'r Davy and my sister comes aboard at Gravesen', arternoon o' next day, they'll see the last on us."

"And that we shall do," said I, "be sure!"

"Until then, and until we are at sea," observed Mr. Micawber, with a glance of intelligence at me, "Mr. Peggotty and myself will constantly keep a double look-out together on our goods and chattels. Emma, my love," said Mr. Micawber, clearing his throat in his magnificent way, "my friend Mr. Thomas Traddles is so obliging as to solicit, in my ear, that he should have the privilege of ordering the ingredients necessary to the composition of a moderate portion of that beverage which is peculiarly associated, in our minds, with the Roast Beef of Old England. I allude to—in short, Punch. Under ordinary circumstances, I should scruple to entreat the indulgence of Miss Trotwood and Miss Wickfield, but—"

"I can only say for myself," said my aunt, "that I will drink all happiness and success to you, Mr. Micawber, with the utmost pleasure."

"And I too!" said Agnes with a smile.

Mr. Micawber immediately descended to the bar, where he appeared to be quite at home; and in due time returned with a steaming jug. I could not but observe that he had been peeling the lemons with his own clasp-knife, which, as became the knife of a practical settler, was about a foot long; and which he wiped, not wholly without ostentation, on the sleeve of his coat. Mrs. Micawber and the two elder members of the family I now found to be provided with similar formidable instruments, while

every child had its own wooden spoon attached to its body by a strong line. In a similar anticipation of life afloat, and in the Bush, Mr. Micawber, instead of helping Mrs. Micawber and his eldest son and daughter to punch in wine-glasses, which he might easily have done, for there was a shelf-full in the room, served it out to them in a series of villanous little tin pots; and I never saw him enjoy anything so much as drinking out of his own particular pint pot, and putting it in his pocket at the close of the evening.

"The luxuries of the old country," said Mr. Micawber, with an intense satisfaction in their renouncement, "we abandon. The denizens of the forest cannot, of course, expect to participate in the refinements of the land of the Free."

Here a boy came in to say that Mr. Micawber was wanted downstairs.

"I have a presentiment," said Mrs. Micawber, setting down her tin pot, "that it is a member of my family!"

"If so, my dear," observed Mr. Micawber, with his usual suddenness of warmth on that subject, "as the member of your family — whoever he, she, or it may be — has kept *us* waiting for a considerable period, perhaps the Member may now wait *my* convenience."

"Micawber," said his wife in a low tone, "at such a time as this —"

"It is not meet," said Mr. Micawber, rising, "that every nice offence should bear its comment!" Emma, I stand reprov'd."

"The loss, Micawber," observed his wife, "has been my family's, not yours. If my family are at

length sensible of the deprivation to which their own conduct has, in the past, exposed them, and now desire to extend the hand of fellowship, let it not be repulsed!"

"My dear," he returned, "so be it!"

"If not for their sakes, for mine, Micawber," said his wife.

"Emma," he returned, "that view of the question is, at such a moment, irresistible. I cannot, even now, distinctly pledge myself to fall upon your family's neck; but the member of your family, who is now in attendance, shall have no genial warmth frozen by me."

Mr. Micawber withdrew, and was absent some little time, in the course of which Mrs. Micawber was not wholly free from an apprehension that words might have arisen between him and the Member. At length the same boy re-appeared, and presented me with a note written in pencil, and headed, in a legal manner, "Heep v. Micawber." From this document I learned that Mr. Micawber, being again arrested, was in a final paroxysm of despair; and that he begged me to send him his knife and pint pot by bearer, as they might prove serviceable during the brief remainder of his existence in jail. He also requested, as a last act of friendship, that I would see his family to the Parish Workhouse, and forget that such a Being ever lived.

Of course I answered this note by going down with the boy to pay the money, where I found Mr. Micawber sitting in a corner, looking darkly at the sheriff's officer who had effected the capture. On his release, he embraced me with the utmost fervor; and made an entry of the transaction in his pocket-

book—being very particular, I recollect, about a halfpenny I inadvertently omitted from my statement of the total.

This momentous pocket-book was a timely reminder to him of another transaction. On our return to the room upstairs (where he accounted for his absence by saying that it had been occasioned by circumstances over which he had no control), he took out of it a large sheet of paper, folded small, and quite covered with long sums, carefully worked. From the glimpse I had of them, I should say that I never saw such sums out of a school ciphering book. These, it seemed, were calculations of compound interest on what he called “the principal amount of forty-one, ten, eleven and a half,” for various periods. After a careful consideration of these, and an elaborate estimate of his resources, he had come to the conclusion to select that sum which represented the amount with compound interest to two years, fifteen calendar months, and fourteen days, from that date. For this he had drawn a note of hand with great neatness, which he handed over to Traddles on the spot, a discharge of his debt in full (as between man and man), with many acknowledgments.

“I have still a presentiment,” said Mrs. Micawber, pensively shaking her head, “that my family will appear on board before we finally depart.”

Mr. Micawber evidently had his presentiment on the subject too, but he put it in his tin pot and swallowed it.

“If you have any opportunity of sending letters home on your passage, Mrs. Micawber,” said my aunt, “you must let us hear from you, you know.”

"My dear Miss Trotwood," she replied, "I shall only be too happy to think that any one expects to hear from us. I shall not fail to correspond. Mr. Copperfield, I trust, as an old and familiar friend, will not object to receive occasional intelligence, himself, from one who knew him when the twins were yet unconscious?"

I said that I should hope to hear whenever she had an opportunity of writing.

"Please Heaven, there will be many such opportunities," said Mr. Micawber. "The ocean, in these times, is a perfect fleet of ships; and we can hardly fail to encounter many, in running over. It is merely crossing," said Mr. Micawber, trifling with his eyeglass, "merely crossing. The distance is quite imaginary."

I think, now, how odd it was, but how wonderfully like Mr. Micawber, that, when he went from London to Canterbury, he should have talked as if he were going to the farthest limits of the earth; and, when he went from England to Australia, as if he were going for a little trip across the Channel.

"On the voyage I shall endeavor," said Mr. Micawber, "occasionally to spin them a yarn; and the melody of my son Wilkins will, I trust, be acceptable at the galley-fire. When Mrs. Micawber has her sea-legs on — an expression in which I hope there is no conventional impropriety — she will give them, I dare say, Little Taffin. Porpoises and Dolphins, I believe, will be frequently observed athwart our Bows, and, either on the Starboard or the Larboard Quarter, objects of interest will be continually descried. In short," said Mr. Micawber with the old genteel air, "the probability is, all will

be found so exciting, alow and aloft, that when the look-out, stationed in the main-top, cries Land-ho! we shall be very considerably astonished!"

With that he flourished off the contents of his little tin pot, as if he had made the voyage, and had passed a first-class examination before the highest naval authorities.

"What *I* chiefly hope, my dear Mr. Copperfield," said Mrs. Micawber, "is, that in some branches of our family we may live again in the old country. Do not frown, Micawber! I do not now refer to my own family, but to our children's children. However vigorous the sapling," said Mrs. Micawber, shaking her head, "I cannot forget the parent tree; and when our race attains to eminence and fortune, I own I should wish that fortune to flow into the coffers of Britannia."

"My dear," said Mr. Micawber, "Britannia must take her chance. I am bound to say that she has never done much for me, and that I have no particular wish upon the subject."

"Micawber," returned Mrs. Micawber, "there you are wrong. You are going out, Micawber, to this distant clime, to strengthen, not to weaken, the connection between yourself and Albion."

"The connection in question, my love," rejoined Mr. Micawber, "has not laid me, I repeat, under that load of personal obligation that I am at all sensitive as to the formation of another connection."

"Micawber," returned Mrs. Micawber, "there, I again say, you are wrong. You do not know your power, Micawber. It is that which will strengthen, even in this step you are about to take, the connection between yourself and Albion."

Mr. Micawber sat in his elbow-chair, with his eyebrows raised ; half receiving and half repudiating Mrs. Micawber's views as they were stated, but very sensible of their foresight.

"My dear Mr. Copperfield," said Mrs. Micawber, "I wish Mr. Micawber to feel his position. It appears to me highly important that Mr. Micawber should, from the hour of his embarkation, feel his position. Your old knowledge of me, my dear Mr. Copperfield, will have told you that I have not the sanguine disposition of Mr. Micawber. My disposition is, if I may say so, eminently practical. I know that this is a long voyage. I know that it will involve many privations and inconveniences. I cannot shut my eyes to those facts. But, I also know what Mr. Micawber is. I know the latent power of Mr. Micawber. And therefore I consider it vitally important that Mr. Micawber should feel his position."

"My love," he observed, "perhaps you will allow me to remark that it is barely possible that I *do* feel my position at the present moment."

"I think not, Micawber," she rejoined. "Not fully. My dear Mr. Copperfield, Mr. Micawber's is not a common case. Mr. Micawber is going to a distant country, expressly in order that he may be fully understood and appreciated for the first time. I wish Mr. Micawber to take his stand upon that vessel's prow, and firmly say, 'This country I am come to conquer! Have you honors? Have you riches? Have you posts of profitable pecuniary emolument? Let them be brought forward. They are mine!'"

Mr. Micawber, glancing at us all, seemed to think there was a good deal in this idea.

"I wish Mr. Micawber, if I make myself understood," said Mrs. Micawber in her argumentative tone, "to be the Caesar of his own fortunes. That, my dear Mr. Copperfield, appears to me to be his true position. From the first moment of this voyage, I wish Mr. Micawber to stand upon that vessel's prow and say, 'Enough of delay: enough of disappointment: enough of limited means. That was in the old country. This is the new. Produce your reparation. Bring it forward!'"

Mr. Micawber folded his arms in a resolute manner, as if he were then stationed on the figure-head.

"And doing that," said Mrs. Micawber — "feeling his position — am I not right in saying that Mr. Micawber will strengthen, and not weaken, his connection with Britain? An important public character arising in that hemisphere, shall I be told that its influence will not be felt at home? Can I be so weak as to imagine that Mr. Micawber, wielding the rod of talent and of power in Australia, will be nothing in England? I am but a woman; but I should be unworthy of myself, and of my papa, if I were guilty of such absurd weakness."

Mrs. Micawber's conviction that her arguments were unanswerable gave a moral elevation to her tone which I think I had never heard in it before.

"And therefore it is," said Mrs. Micawber, "that I the more wish that, at a future period, we may live again on the parent soil. Mr. Micawber may be — I cannot disguise from myself that the probability is, Mr. Micawber will be — a page of History; and he ought then to be represented in the country which gave him birth, and did *not* give him employment!"

"My love," observed Mr. Micawber, "it is impossible for me not to be touched by your affection. I am always willing to defer to your good sense. What will be—will be. Heaven forbid that I should grudge my native country any portion of the wealth that may be accumulated by our descendants!"

"That's well," said my aunt, nodding towards Mr. Peggotty, "and I drink my love to you all, and every blessing and success attend you!"

Mr. Peggotty put down the two children he had been nursing, one on each knee, to join Mr. and Mrs. Micawber in drinking to all of us in return; and when he and the Micawbers cordially shook hands as comrades, and his brown face brightened with a smile, I felt that he would make his way, establish a good name, and be beloved, go where he would.

Even the children were instructed each to dip a wooden spoon into Mr. Micawber's pot, and pledge us in its contents. When this was done, my aunt and Agnes rose, and parted from the emigrants. It was a sorrowful farewell. They were all crying; the children hung about Agnes to the last; and we left poor Mrs. Micawber in a very distressed condition, sobbing and weeping by a dim candle, that must have made the room look, from the river, like a miserable lighthouse.

I went down again next morning to see that they were away. They had departed, in a boat, as early as five o'clock. It was a wonderful instance to me of the gap such partings make, that although my association of them with the tumble-down public-house and the wooden stairs dated only from last night, both seemed dreary and deserted, now that they were gone.

In the afternoon of the next day my old nurse and I went down to Gravesend. We found the ship in the river, surrounded by a crowd of boats; a favorable wind blowing; the signal for sailing at her masthead. I hired a boat directly, and we put off to her; and, getting through the little vortex of confusion of which she was the centre, went on board.

Mr. Peggotty was waiting for us on deck. He told me that Mr. Micawber had just now been arrested again (and for the last time) at the suit of Heep, and that, in compliance with the request I had made to him, he had paid the money: which I repaid him. He then took us down between decks; and there any lingering fears I had of his having heard any rumors of what had happened were dispelled by Mr. Micawber's coming out of the gloom, taking his arm with an air of friendship and protection, and telling me that they had scarcely been asunder for a moment since the night before last.

It was such a strange scene to me, and so confined and dark, that, at first, I could make out hardly anything; but, by degrees, it cleared, as my eyes became more accustomed to the gloom, and I seemed to stand in a picture by *OSTADE*. Among the great beams, bulks, and ringbolts of the ship, and the emigrant berths, and chests, and bundles, and barrels, and heaps of miscellaneous baggage — lighted up, here and there, by dangling lanterns; and elsewhere by the yellow daylight straying down a windsail or a hatchway — were crowded groups of people, making new friendships, taking leave of one another, talking, laughing, crying, eating, and drinking; some, already settled down into the possession of their

few feet of space, with their little households arranged, and tiny children established on stools, or in dwarf elbow-chairs; others, despairing of a resting-place, and wandering disconsolately. From babies who had but a week or two of life behind them, to crooked old men and women who seemed to have but a week or two of life before them; and from ploughmen, bodily carrying out soil of England on their boots, to smiths taking away samples of its soot and smoke upon their skins; every age and occupation appeared to be crammed into the narrow compass of the 'tween decks.

As my eye glanced round this place, I thought I saw sitting, by an open port, with one of the Micawber children near her, a figure like Emily's; it first attracted my attention by another figure parting from it with a kiss, and, as it glided calmly away through the disorder, reminding me of — Agnes! But in the rapid motion and confusion, and in the unsettlement of my own thoughts, I lost it again; and only knew that the time was come when all visitors were being warned to leave the ship; that my nurse was crying on a chest beside me; and that Mrs. Gummidge, assisted by some younger stooping woman in black, was busily arranging Mr. Peggotty's goods.

"Is there any last wured, Mas'r Davy?" said he. "Is there any one forgotten thing afore we part?"

"One thing!" said I. "Martha!"

He touched the younger woman I have mentioned on the shoulder, and Martha stood before me.

"Heaven bless you, you good man!" cried I. "You take her with you?"

She answered for him with a burst of tears. I



could speak no more at that time, but I wrung his hand; and, if ever I have loved and honored any man, I loved and honored that man in my soul.

The ship was clearing fast of strangers. The greatest trial that I had remained. I told him what the noble spirit that was gone had given me in charge to say at parting. It moved him deeply. But when he charged me, in return, with many messages of affection and regret for those deaf ears, he moved me more.

The time was come. I embraced him, took my weeping nurse upon my arm, and hurried away. On deck, I took leave of poor Mrs. Micawber. She was looking distractedly about for her family, even then; and her last words to me were, that she never would desert Mr. Micawber.

We went over the side into our boat, and lay at a little distance to see the ship wafted on her course. It was then calm, radiant sunset. She lay between us and the red light, and every taper line and spar was visible against the glow. A sight at once so beautiful, so mournful, and so hopeful, as the glorious ship, lying, still, on the flushed water, with all the life on board her crowded at the bulwarks, and there clustering, for a moment, bare-headed and silent, I never saw.

Silent, only for a moment. As the sails rose to the wind, and the ship began to move, there broke from all the boats three resounding cheers, which those on board took up and echoed back, and which were echoed and re-echoed. My heart burst out when I heard the sound, and beheld the waving of the hats and handkerchiefs — and then I saw her!

Then, I saw her, at her uncle's side, and trembling

on his shoulder. He pointed to us with an eager hand; and she saw us, and waved her last good-by to me. Ay, Emily, beautiful and drooping, cling to him with the utmost trust of thy bruised heart; for he has clung to thee with all the might of his great love!

Surrounded by the rosy light, and standing high upon the deck, apart together, she clinging to him, and he holding her, they solemnly passed away. The night had fallen on the Kentish hills when we were rowed ashore — and fallen darkly upon me.

CHAPTER XIX.

ABSENCE.

It was a long and gloomy night that gathered on me, haunted by the ghosts of many hopes, of many dear remembrances, many errors, many unavailing sorrows and regrets.

I went away from England; not knowing, even then, how great the shock was that I had to bear. I left all who were dear to me, and went away; and believed that I had borne it, and it was past. As a man upon a field of battle will receive a mortal hurt, and scarcely know that he is struck, so I, when I was left alone with my undisciplined heart, had no conception of the wound with which it had to strive.

The knowledge came upon me, not quickly, but little by little, and grain by grain. The desolate feeling with which I went abroad deepened and widened hourly. At first it was a heavy sense of loss and sorrow, wherein I could distinguish little else. By imperceptible degrees, it became a hopeless consciousness of all that I had lost—love, friendship, interest; of all that had been shattered—my first trust, my first affection, the whole airy castle of my life; of all that remained—a ruined blank and waste, lying wide around me, unbroken, to the dark horizon.

If my grief were selfish, I did not know it to be so. I mourned for my child-wife, taken from her blooming world so young. I mourned for him who might have won the love and admiration of thousands, as he had won mine long ago. I mourned for the broken heart that had found rest in the stormy sea; and for the wandering remnants of the simple home, where I had heard the night wind blowing when I was a child.

From the accumulated sadness into which I fell, I had at length no hope of ever issuing again. I roamed from place to place, carrying my burden with me everywhere. I felt its whole weight now; and I drooped beneath it, and I said in my heart that it could never be lightened.

When this despondency was at its worst, I believed that I should die. Sometimes I thought that I would like to die at home; and actually turned back on my road, that I might get there soon. At other times I passed on farther away, from city to city, seeking I know not what, and trying to leave I know not what behind.

It is not in my power to retrace, one by one, all the weary phases of distress of mind through which I passed. There are some dreams that can only be imperfectly and vaguely described; and when I oblige myself to look back on this time of my life, I seem to be recalling such a dream. I see myself passing on among the novelties of foreign towns, palaces, cathedrals, temples, pictures, castles, tombs, fantastic streets—the old abiding-places of History and Fancy—as a dreamer might; bearing my painful load through all, and hardly conscious of the objects as they fade before me. Listlessness to

everything but brooding sorrow was the night that fell on my undisciplined heart. Let me look up from it—as at last I did, thank Heaven!—and from its long, sad, wretched dream, to dawn.

For many months I travelled with this ever-darkening cloud upon my mind. Some blind reasons that I had for not returning home—reasons then struggling within me, vainly, for more distinct expression—kept me on my pilgrimage. Sometimes I had proceeded restlessly from place to place, stopping nowhere; sometimes I had lingered long in one spot. I had had no purpose, no sustaining soul within me, anywhere.

I was in Switzerland. I had come out of Italy, over one of the great passes of the Alps, and had since wandered with a guide among the by-ways of the mountains. If those awful solitudes had spoken to my heart, I did not know it. I had found sublimity and wonder in the dread heights and precipices, in the roaring torrents, and the wastes of ice and snow; but as yet they had taught me nothing else.

I came one evening before sunset, down into a valley, where I was to rest. In the course of my descent to it, by the winding track along the mountain-side, from which I saw it shining far below, I think some long unwonted sense of beauty and tranquillity, some softening influence awakened by its peace, moved faintly in my breast. I remember pausing once, with a kind of sorrow that was not all oppressive, not quite despairing. I remember almost hoping that some better change was possible within me.

I came into the valley as the evening sun was

shining on the remote heights of snow that closed it in, like eternal clouds. The bases of the mountains forming the gorge in which the little village lay were richly green; and, high above this gentler vegetation, grew forests of dark fir, cleaving the wintry snowdrift, wedge-like, and stemming the avalanche. Above these were range upon range of craggy steeps, gray rock, bright ice, and smooth verdure-specks of pasture, all gradually blending with the crowning snow. Dotted here and there on the mountain's side, each tiny dot a home, were lonely wooden cottages, so dwarfed by the towering heights that they appeared too small for toys. So did even the clustered village in the valley, with its wooden bridge across the stream, where the stream tumbled over broken rocks, and roared away among the trees. In the quiet air there was a sound of distant singing—shepherd voices; but, as one bright evening cloud floated midway along the mountain's side, I could almost have believed it came from there, and was not earthly music. All at once, in this serenity, great Nature spoke to me; and soothed me to lay down my weary head upon the grass, and weep as I had not wept yet since Dora died!

I had found a packet of letters awaiting me but a few minutes before, and had strolled out of the village to read them while my supper was making ready. Other packets had missed me, and I had received none for a long time. Beyond a line or two, to say that I was well, and had arrived at such a place, I had not had fortitude or constancy to write a letter since I left home.

The packet was in my hand. I opened it, and read the writing of Agnes.

She was happy and useful, was prospering as she had hoped. That was all she told me of herself. The rest referred to me.

She gave me no advice; she urged no duty on me; she only told me, in her own fervent manner, what her trust in me was. She knew (she said) how such a nature as mine would turn affliction to good. She knew how trial and emotion would exalt and strengthen it. She was sure that in my every purpose I should gain a firmer and a higher tendency, through the grief I had undergone. She, who so gloried in my fame, and so looked forward to its augmentation, well knew that I would labor on. She knew that in me sorrow could not be weakness, but must be strength. As the endurance of my childish days had done its part to make me what I was, so greater calamities would nerve me on, to be yet better than I was; and so, as they had taught me, would I teach others. She commended me to God, who had taken my innocent darling to His rest; and in her sisterly affection cherished me always, and was always at my side, go where I would; proud of what I had done, but infinitely prouder yet of what I was reserved to do.

I put the letter in my breast, and thought what had I been an hour ago? When I heard the voices die away, and saw the quiet evening cloud grow dim, and all the colors in the valley fade, and the golden snow upon the mountain-tops become a remote part of the pale night sky, yet felt that the night was passing from my mind, and all its shadows clearing, there was no name for the love I bore her, dearer to me, henceforward, than ever until then.

I read her letter many times. I wrote to her

before I slept. I told her that I had been in sore need of her help; that without her I was not, and I never had been, what she thought me; but, that she inspired me to be that, and I would try.

I did try. In three months more, a year would have passed since the beginning of my sorrow. I determined to make no resolutions until the expiration of those three months, but to try. I lived in that valley, and its neighborhood, all the time.

The three months gone, I resolved to remain away from home for some time longer; to settle myself for the present in Switzerland, which was growing dear to me in the remembrance of that evening; to resume my pen; to work.

I resorted humbly whither Agnes had commended me; I sought out Nature, never sought in vain; and I admitted to my breast the human interest I had lately shrunk from. It was not long before I had almost as many friends in the valley as in Yarmouth: and when I left it, before the winter set in, for Geneva, and came back in the spring, their cordial greetings had a homely sound to me, although they were not conveyed in English words.

I worked early and late, patiently and hard. I wrote a story, with a purpose growing, not remotely, out of my experience, and sent it to Traddles, and he arranged for its publication very advantageously for me; and the tidings of my growing reputation began to reach me from travellers whom I encountered by chance. After some rest and change, I fell to work, in my old ardent way, on a new fancy, which took strong possession of me. As I advanced in the execution of this task, I felt it more and more, and

roused my utmost energies to do it well. This was my third work of fiction. It was not half written when, in an interval of rest, I thought of returning home.

For a long time, though studying and working patiently, I had accustomed myself to robust exercise. My health, severely impaired when I left England, was quite restored. I had seen much. I had been in many countries, and I hope I had improved my store of knowledge.

I have now recalled all that I think it needful to recall here of this term of absence—with one reservation. I have made it, thus far, with no purpose of suppressing any of my thoughts; for, as I have elsewhere said, this narrative is my written memory. I have desired to keep the most secret current of my mind apart, and to the last. I enter on it now.

I cannot so completely penetrate the mystery of my own heart as to know when I began to think that I might have set its earliest and brightest hopes on Agnes. I cannot say at what stage of my grief it first became associated with the reflection that, in my wayward boyhood, I had thrown away the treasure of her love. I believe I may have heard some whisper of that distant thought, in the old unhappy loss or want of something never to be realized, of which I had been sensible. But the thought came into my mind as a new reproach and new regret, when I was left so sad and lonely in the world.

If, at that time, I had been much with her, I should, in the weakness of my desolation, have betrayed this. It was what I remotely dreaded

when I was first impelled to stay away from England. I could not have borne to lose the smallest portion of her sisterly affection; yet, in that betrayal, I should have set a constraint between us hitherto unknown.

I could not forget that the feeling with which she now regarded me had grown up in my own free choice and course. That if she had ever loved me with another love — and I sometimes thought the time was when she might have done so — I had cast it away. It was nothing, now, that I had accustomed myself to think of her, when we were both mere children, as one who was far removed from my wild fancies. I had bestowed my passionate tenderness upon another object; and what I might have done I had not done; and what Agnes was to me, I and her own noble heart had made her.

In the beginning of the change that gradually worked in me, when I tried to get a better understanding of myself and be a better man, I did glance, through some indefinite probation, to a period when I might possibly hope to cancel the mistaken past, and to be so blessed as to marry her. But, as time wore on, this shadowy prospect faded, and departed from me. If she had ever loved me, then, I should hold her the more sacred, remembering the confidences I had reposed in her, her knowledge of my errant heart, the sacrifice she must have made to be my friend and sister, and the victory she had won. If she had never loved me, could I believe that she would love me now?

I had always felt my weakness, in comparison with her constancy and fortitude; and now I felt it more and more. Whatever I might have been to

her, or she to me, if I had been more worthy of her long ago, I was not now, and she was not. The time was past. I had let it go by, and had deservedly lost her.

That I suffered much in these contentions, that they filled me with unhappiness and remorse, and yet that I had a sustaining sense that it was required of me, in right and honor, to keep away from myself, with shame, the thought of turning to the dear girl in the withering of my hopes, from whom I had frivolously turned when they were bright and fresh — which consideration was at the root of every thought I had concerning her — is all equally true. I made no effort to conceal from myself, now, that I loved her, that I was devoted to her ; but I brought the assurance home to myself, that it was now too late, and that our long-subsisting relation must be undisturbed.

I had thought, much and often, of my Dora's shadowing out to me what might have happened, in those years that were destined not to try us. I had considered how the things that never happen are often as much realities to us, in their effects, as those that are accomplished. The very years she spoke of were realities now, for my correction ; and would have been, one day, a little later perhaps, though we had parted in our earliest folly. I endeavored to convert what might have been between myself and Agnes into a means of making me more self-denying, more resolved, more conscious of myself, and my defects and errors. Thus, through the reflection that it might have been, I arrived at the conviction that it could never be.

These, with their perplexities and inconsistencies,
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were the shifting quicksands of my mind, from the time of my departure to the time of my return home, three years afterwards. Three years had elapsed since the sailing of the emigrant ship; when, at that same hour of sunset, and in the same place, I stood on the deck of the packet-vessel that brought me home, looking on the rosy water where I had seen the image of that ship reflected.

Three years. Long in the aggregate, though short as they went by. And home was very dear to me, and Agnes too—but she was not mine—she was never to be mine. She might have been, but that was past!

CHAPTER XX.

RETURN.

I LANDED in London on a wintry autumn evening. It was dark and raining, and I saw more fog and mud in a minute than I had seen in a year. I walked from the Custom House to the Monument before I found a coach ; and although the very house-fronts, looking on the swollen gutters, were like old friends to me, I could not but admit that they were very dingy friends.

I have often remarked — I suppose everybody has — that one's going away from a familiar place would seem to be the signal for change in it. As I looked out of the coach window, and observed that an old house on Fish-Street Hill, which had stood untouched by painter, carpenter, or bricklayer, for a century, had been pulled down in my absence ; and that a neighboring street, of time-honored insalubrity and inconvenience, was being drained and widened ; I half expected to find St. Paul's Cathedral looking older.

For some changes in the fortunes of my friends I was prepared. My aunt had long been re-established at Dover, and Traddles had begun to get into some little practice at the Bar, in the very first term after

my departure. He had chambers in Gray's Inn now; and had told me, in his last letters, that he was not without hopes of being soon united to the dearest girl in the world.

They expected me home before Christmas; but had no idea of my returning so soon. I had purposely misled them, that I might have the pleasure of taking them by surprise. And yet, I was perverse enough to feel a chill and disappointment in receiving no welcome, and rattling alone and silent, through the misty streets.

The well-known shops, however, with their cheerful lights, did something for me; and, when I alighted at the door of the Gray's Inn Coffee-house, I had recovered my spirits. It recalled, at first, that so different time when I had put up at the Golden Cross, and reminded me of the changes that had come to pass since then; but that was natural.

"Do you know where Mr. Traddles lives in the Inn?" I asked the waiter as I warmed myself by the coffee-room fire.

"Holborn Court, sir. Number Two."

"Mr. Traddles has a rising reputation among the lawyers, I believe?" said I.

"Well, sir," returned the waiter, "probably he has, sir; but I am not aware of it myself."

This waiter, who was middle-aged and spare, looked for help to a waiter of more authority—a stout, potential old man, with a double chin, in black breeches and stockings, who came out of a place like a churchwarden's pew, at the end of the coffee-room, where he kept company with a cash-box, a Directory, a Law List, and other books and papers.

"Mr. Traddles," said the spare waiter. "Number Two in the Court."

The potential waiter waved him away, and turned, gravely, to me.

"I was inquiring," said I, "whether Mr. Traddles, at Number Two in the Court, has not a rising reputation among the lawyers?"

"Never heard his name," said the waiter in a rich husky voice.

I felt quite apologetic for Traddles.

"He's a young man, sure?" said the portentous waiter, fixing his eyes severely on me. "How long has he been in the Inn?"

"Not above three years," said I.

The waiter, who I supposed had lived in his churchwarden's pew for forty years, could not pursue such an insignificant subject. He asked me what I would have for dinner?

I felt I was in England again, and really was quite cast down on Traddles's account. There seemed to be no hope for him. I meekly ordered a bit of fish and a steak, and stood before the fire musing on his obscurity.

As I followed the chief waiter with my eyes, I could not help thinking that the garden in which he had gradually blown to be the flower he was, was an arduous place to rise in. It had such a prescriptive, stiff-necked, long-established, solemn, elderly air. I glanced about the room, which had had its sanded floor sanded, no doubt, in exactly the same manner when the chief waiter was a boy — if he ever was a boy, which appeared improbable; and at the shining tables, where I saw myself reflected, in unruffled depths of old mahogany; and at the lamps, without

a flaw in their trimming or cleaning; and at the comfortable green curtains, with their pure brass rods, snugly enclosing the boxes; and at the two large coal fires, brightly burning; and at the rows of decanters, burly as if with the consciousness of pipes of expensive old port wine below; and both England, and the law, appeared to me to be very difficult indeed to be taken by storm. I went up to my bedroom to change my wet clothes; and the vast extent of that old wainscoted apartment (which was over the archway leading to the Inn, I remember), and the sedate immensity of the four-post bedstead, and the indomitable gravity of the chests of drawers, all seemed to unite in sternly frowning on the fortunes of Traddles, or on any such daring youth. I came down again to my dinner; and even the slow comfort of the meal, and the orderly silence of the place — which was bare of guests, the Long Vacation not yet being over — were eloquent on the audacity of Traddles, and his small hopes of a livelihood for twenty years to come.

I had seen nothing like this since I went away, and it quite dashed my hopes for my friend. The chief waiter had had enough of me. He came near me no more; but devoted himself to an old gentleman in long gaiters, to meet whom a pint of special port seemed to come out of the cellar of its own accord, for he gave no order. The second waiter informed me, in a whisper, that this old gentleman was a retired conveyancer living in the Square, and worth a mint of money, which it was expected he would leave to his laundress's daughter; likewise that it was rumored that he had a service of plate in a bureau, all tarnished with lying by, though more

than one spoon and a fork had never yet been beheld in his chambers by mortal vision. By this time I quite gave Traddles up for lost; and settled in my own mind that there was no hope for him.

Being very anxious to see the dear old fellow, nevertheless, I despatched my dinner, in a manner not at all calculated to raise me in the opinion of the chief waiter, and hurried out by the back way. Number Two in the Court was soon reached; and an inscription on the doorpost informing me that Mr. Traddles occupied a set of chambers on the top story, I ascended the staircase. A crazy old staircase I found it to be, feebly lighted on each landing by a club-headed little oil wick, dying away in a little dungeon of dirty glass.

In the course of my stumbling upstairs, I fancied I heard a pleasant sound of laughter; and not the laughter of an attorney or barrister, or attorney's clerk or barrister's clerk, but of two or three merry girls. Happening, however, as I stopped to listen, to put my foot in a hole where the Honorable Society of Gray's Inn had left a plank deficient, I fell down with some noise, and when I recovered my footing all was silent.

Groping my way more carefully for the rest of the journey, my heart beat high when I found the outer door, which had MR. TRADDLES painted on it, open. I knocked. A considerable scuffling within ensued, but nothing else. I therefore knocked again.

A small, sharp-looking lad, half footboy and half clerk, who was very much out of breath, but who looked at me as if he defied me to prove it legally, presented himself.

"Is Mr. Traddles within?" I said.

"Yes, sir, but he's engaged."

"I want to see him."

After a moment's survey of me, the sharp-looking lad decided to let me in; and opening the door wider for that purpose, admitted me, first, into a little closet of a hall, and next into a little sitting-room; when I came into the presence of my old friend (also out of breath), seated at a table, and bending over papers.

"Good God!" cried Traddles, looking up. "It's Copperfield!" and rushed into my arms, where I held him tight.

"All well, my dear Traddles?"

"All well, my dear, dear Copperfield, and nothing but good news!"

We cried with pleasure, both of us.

"My dear fellow," said Traddles, rumpling his hair in his excitement, which was a most unnecessary operation, "my dearest Copperfield, my long-lost and most welcome friend, how glad I am to see you! How brown you are! How glad I am! Upon my life and honor, I never was so rejoiced, my beloved Copperfield, never!"

I was equally at a loss to express my emotions. I was quite unable to speak, at first.

"My dear fellow!" said Traddles. "And grown so famous! My glorious Copperfield! Good gracious me, *when* did you come, *where* have you come from, *what* have you been doing?"

Never pausing for an answer to anything he said, Traddles, who had clapped me into an easy-chair by the fire, all this time impetuously stirred the fire with one hand, and pulled at my neckerchief with the other, under some wild delusion that it was a

great-coat. Without putting down the poker, he now hugged me again ; and I hugged him ; and, both laughing, and both wiping our eyes, we both sat down, and shook hands across the hearth.

"To think," said Traddles, "that you should have been so nearly coming home as you must have been, my dear old boy, and not at the ceremony!"

"What ceremony, my dear Traddles?"

"Good gracious me!" cried Traddles, opening his eyes in his old way. "Didn't you get my last letter?"

"Certainly not, if it referred to any ceremony."

"Why, my dear Copperfield," said Traddles, sticking his hair upright with both hands, and then putting his hands on his knees, "I am married!"

"Married!" I cried joyfully.

"Lord bless me, yes!" said Traddles—"by the Reverend Horace—to Sophy—down in Devonshire. Why, my dear boy, she's behind the window curtain! Look here!"

To my amazement, the dearest girl in the world came at that same instant, laughing and blushing, from her place of concealment. And a more cheerful, amiable, honest, happy, bright-looking bride, I believe (as I could not help saying on the spot) the world never saw. I kissed her as an old acquaintance should, and wished them joy with all my might of heart.

"Dear me," said Traddles, "what a delightful re-union this is! You are so extremely brown, my dear Copperfield! God bless my soul, how happy I am!"

"And so am I," said I.

"And I am sure I am!" said the blushing and laughing Sophy.

"We are all as happy as possible!" said Traddles. "Even the girls are happy. Dear me, I declare I forgot them!"

"Forgot?" said I.

"The girls," said Traddles. "Sophy's sisters. They are staying with us. They have come to have a peep at London. The fact is, when — Was it you that tumbled upstairs, Copperfield?"

"It was," said I, laughing.

"Well, then, when you tumbled upstairs," said Traddles, "I was romping with the girls. In point of fact, we were playing at Puss-in-the-Corner. But as that wouldn't do in Westminster Hall, and as it wouldn't look quite professional if they were seen by a client, they decamped. And they are now — listening, I have no doubt," said Traddles, glancing at the door of another room.

"I am sorry," said I, laughing afresh, "to have occasioned such a dispersion."

"Upon my word," rejoined Traddles, greatly delighted, "if you had seen them running away, and running back again after you had knocked, to pick up the combs they had dropped out of their hair, and going on in the maddest manner, you wouldn't have said so. My love, will you fetch the girls?"

Sophy tripped away, and we heard her received in the adjoining room with a peal of laughter.

"Really musical, isn't it, my dear Copperfield?" said Traddles. "It's very agreeable to hear. It quite lights up these old rooms. To an unfortunate bachelor of a fellow who has lived alone all his life, you know, it's positively delicious. It's charming. Poor things, they have had a great loss in Sophy —

who, I do assure you, Copperfield, is, and ever was, the dearest girl! — and it gratifies me beyond expression to find them in such good spirits. The society of girls is a very delightful thing, Copperfield. It's not professional, but it's very delightful."

Observing that he slightly faltered, and comprehending that in the goodness of his heart he was fearful of giving me some pain by what he had said, I expressed my concurrence with a heartiness that evidently relieved and pleased him greatly.

"But then," said Traddles, "our domestic arrangements are, to say the truth, quite unprofessional altogether, my dear Copperfield. Even Sophy's being here is unprofessional. And we have no other place of abode. We have put to sea in a cock-boat, but we are quite prepared to rough it. And Sophy's an extraordinary manager! You'll be surprised how those girls are stowed away. I am sure I hardly know how it's done."

"Are many of the young ladies with you?" I inquired.

"The eldest, the Beauty, is here," said Traddles in a low confidential voice, "Caroline. And Sarah's here — the one I mentioned to you as having something the matter with her spine, you know. Immensely better! And the two youngest that Sophy educated are with us. And Louisa's here."

"Indeed!" cried I.

"Yes," said Traddles. "Now, the whole set — I mean the chambers — is only three rooms; but Sophy arranges for the girls in the most wonderful way, and they sleep as comfortably as possible. Three in that room," said Traddles, pointing. "Two in that."

I could not help glancing round, in search of the accommodation remaining for Mr. and Mrs. Traddles. Traddles understood me.

"Well!" said Traddles, "we are prepared to rough it, as I said just now, and we *did* improvise a bed last week upon the floor here. But there's a little room in the roof—a very nice room when you're up there—which Sophy papered herself, to surprise me, and that's our room at present. It's a capital little gypsy sort of place. There's quite a view from it."

"And you are happily married at last, my dear Traddles," said I. "How rejoiced I am!"

"Thank you, my dear Copperfield," said Traddles as we shook hands once more. "Yes, I am as happy as it's possible to be. There's your old friend, you see," said Traddles, nodding triumphantly at the flower-pot and stand; "and there's the table with the marble top! All the other furniture is plain and serviceable, you perceive. And as to plate, Lord bless you, we haven't so much as a tea-spoon."

"All to be earned?" said I cheerfully.

"Exactly so," replied Traddles. "all to be earned. Of course we have something in the shape of tea-spoons, because we stir our tea. But they're Britannia metal."

"The silver will be the brighter when it comes," said I.

"The very thing we say!" cried Traddles. "You see, my dear Copperfield," falling again into the low confidential tone, "after I had delivered my argument in *DOE dem. JIPES versus WIGZELL*, which did me great service with the profession, I went down into Devonshire, and had some serious conversation

in private with the Reverend Horace. I dwelt upon the fact that Sophy — who I do assure you, Copperfield, is the dearest girl!" —

"I am certain she is!" said I.

"She is indeed!" rejoined Traddles. "But I am afraid I am wandering from the subject. Did I mention the Reverend Horace?"

"You said that you dwelt upon the fact —"

"True! Upon the fact that Sophy and I had been engaged for a long period, and that Sophy, with the permission of her parents, was more than content to take me — in short," said Traddles, with his old frank smile, "on our present Britannia-metal footing. Very well. I then proposed to the Reverend Horace — who is a most excellent clergyman, Copperfield, and ought to be a Bishop; or at least ought to have enough to live upon, without pinching himself — that if I could turn the corner, say of two hundred and fifty pounds in one year; and could see my way pretty clearly to that, or something better next year; and could plainly furnish a little place like this, besides; then, and in that case, Sophy and I should be united. I took the liberty of representing that we had been patient for a good many years; and that the circumstance of Sophy's being extraordinarily useful at home ought not to operate with her affectionate parents, against her establishment in life — don't you see?"

"Certainly it ought not," said I.

"I am glad you think so, Copperfield," rejoined Traddles, "because, without any imputation on the Reverend Horace, I do think parents, and brothers, and so forth, are sometimes rather selfish in such cases. Well! I also pointed out that my most

earnest desire was to be useful to the family ; and that if I got on in the world, and anything should happen to him—I refer to the Reverend Horace —”

“I understand,” said I.

“— Or to Mrs. Crewler—it would be the utmost gratification of my wishes to be a parent to the girls. He replied in a most admirable manner, exceedingly flattering to my feelings, and undertook to obtain the consent of Mrs. Crewler to this arrangement. They had a dreadful time of it with her. It mounted from her legs into her chest, and then into her head —”

“What mounted ?” I asked.

“Her grief,” replied Traddles, with a serious look. “Her feelings generally. As I mentioned on a former occasion, she is a very superior woman, but has lost the use of her limbs. Whatever occurs to harass her, usually settles in her legs ; but on this occasion it mounted to the chest, and then to the head, and, in short, pervaded the whole system in a most alarming manner. However, they brought her through it by unremitting and affectionate attention ; and we were married yesterday six weeks. You have no idea what a Monster I felt, Copperfield, when I saw the whole family crying and fainting away in every direction ! Mrs. Crewler couldn’t see me before we left—couldn’t forgive me, then, for depriving her of her child—but she is a good creature, and has done so since. I had a delightful letter from her only this morning.”

“And in short, my dear friend,” said I, “you feel as blessed as you deserve to feel !”

“Oh ! That’s your partiality !” laughed Traddles. “But, indeed, I am in a most enviable state.

I work hard, and read Law insatiably. I get up at five every morning, and don't mind it at all. I hide the girls in the daytime, and make merry with them in the evening. And I assure you I am quite sorry that they are going home on Tuesday, which is the day before the first day of Michaelmas Term. But here," said Traddles, breaking off in his confidence, and speaking aloud, "*are* the girls! Mr. Copperfield, Miss Crewler—Miss Sarah—Miss Louisa—Margaret and Lucy!"

They were a perfect nest of roses; they looked so wholesome and fresh. They were all pretty, and Miss Caroline was very handsome; but there was a loving, cheerful, fireside quality in Sophy's bright looks, which was better than that, and which assured me that my friend had chosen well. We all sat round the fire; while the sharp boy, who I now divined had lost his breath in putting the papers out, cleared them away again, and produced the tea-things. After that, he retired for the night, shutting the outer door upon us with a bang. Mrs. Traddles, with perfect pleasure and composure beaming from her household eyes, having made the tea, then quietly made the toast as she sat in a corner by the fire.

She had seen Agnes, she told me while she was toasting. "Tom" had taken her down into Kent for a wedding trip, and there she had seen my aunt, too; and both my aunt and Agnes were well, and they had all talked of nothing but me. "Tom" had never had me out of his thoughts, she really believed, all the time I had been away. "Tom" was the authority for everything. "Tom" was evidently the idol of her life; never to be shaken

from his pedestal by any commotion ; always to be believed in, and done homage to with the whole faith of her heart, come what might.

The deference which both she and Traddles showed towards the Beauty pleased me very much. I don't know that I thought it very reasonable ; but I thought it very delightful, and essentially a part of their character. If Traddles ever for an instant missed the tea-spoons that were still to be won, I have no doubt it was when he handed the Beauty her tea. If his sweet-tempered wife could have got up any self-assertion against any one, I am satisfied it could only have been because she was the Beauty's sister. A few slight indications of a rather petted and capricious manner, which I observed in the Beauty, were manifestly considered, by Traddles and his wife, as her birthright and natural endowment. If she had been born a Queen Bee, and they laboring Bees, they could not have been more satisfied of that.

But their self-forgetfulness charmed me. Their pride in these girls, and their submission of themselves to all their whims, was the pleasantest little testimony to their own worth I could have desired to see. If Traddles were addressed as "a darling" once in the course of that evening ; and besought to bring something here, or carry something there, or take something up, or put something down, or find something, or fetch something, he was so addressed, by one or other of his sisters-in-law, at least twelve times in an hour. Neither could they do anything without Sophy. Somebody's hair fell down, and nobody but Sophy could put it up. Somebody forgot how a particular tune went, and nobody but

Sophy could hum that tune right. Somebody wanted to recall the name of a place in Devonshire, and only Sophy knew it. Something was wanted to be written home, and Sophy alone could be trusted to write before breakfast in the morning. Somebody broke down in a piece of knitting, and no one but Sophy was able to put the defaulter in the right direction. They were entire mistresses of the place, and Sophy and Traddles waited on them. How many children Sophy could have taken care of in her time, I can't imagine; but she seemed to be famous for knowing every sort of song that ever was addressed to a child in the English tongue; and she sang dozens to order with the clearest little voice in the world, one after another (every sister issuing directions for a different tune, and the Beauty generally striking in last), so that I was quite fascinated. The best of all was, that, in the midst of their exactions, all the sisters had a great tenderness and respect both for Sophy and Traddles. I am sure, when I took my leave, and Traddles was coming out to walk with me to the coffee-house, I thought I had never seen an obstinate head of hair, or any other head of hair, rolling about in such a shower of kisses.

Altogether, it was a scene I could not help dwelling on with pleasure for a long time after I got back and had wished Traddles good-night. If I had beheld a thousand roses blowing in a top set of chambers, in that withered Gray's Inn, they could not have brightened it half so much. The idea of those Devonshire girls, among the dry law-stationers and the attorneys' offices; and of the tea and toast, and children's songs, in that grim atmosphere of pounce and parchment, red tape, dusty wafers, ink-

jars, brief and draft paper, law reports, writs, declarations, and bills of costs, seemed almost as pleasantly fanciful as if I had dreamed that the Sultan's famous family had been admitted on the roll of attorneys, and had brought the talking bird, the singing tree, and the golden water into Gray's Inn Hall. Somehow, I found that I had taken leave of Traddles for the night, and come back to the coffee-house with a great change in my despondency about him. I began to think he would get on, in spite of all the many orders of chief waiters in England.

Drawing a chair before one of the coffee-room fires to think about him at my leisure, I gradually fell from the consideration of his happiness to tracing prospects in the live coals, and to thinking, as they broke and changed, of the principal vicissitudes and separations that had marked my life. I had not seen a coal fire since I had left England three years ago; though many a wood fire had I watched, as it crumbled into hoary ashes, and mingled with the feathery heap upon the hearth, which not inaptly figured to me, in my despondency, my own dead hopes.

I could think of the past now, gravely, but not bitterly; and could contemplate the future in a brave spirit. Home, in its best sense, was for me no more. She in whom I might have inspired a dearer love, I had taught to be my sister. She would marry, and would have new claimants on her tenderness; and in doing it would never know the love for her that had grown up in my heart. It was right that I should pay the forfeit of my headlong passion. What I reaped, I had sown.

I was thinking, And had I truly disciplined my

heart to this, and could I resolutely bear it, and calmly hold the place in her home which she had calmly held in mine — when I found my eyes resting on a countenance that might have arisen out of the fire, in its association with my early remembrances.

Little Mr. Chillip the doctor, to whose good offices I was indebted in the very first chapter of this history, sat reading a newspaper in the shadow of an opposite corner. He was tolerably stricken in years by this time; but, being a mild, meek, calm little man, had worn so easily, that I thought he looked at that moment just as he might have looked when he sat in our parlor, waiting for me to be born.

Mr. Chillip had left Blunderstone six or seven years ago, and I had never seen him since. He sat placidly perusing the newspaper, with his little head on one side, and a glass of warm sherry negus at his elbow. He was so extremely conciliatory in his manner, that he seemed to apologize to the very newspaper for taking the liberty of reading it.

I walked up to where he was sitting, and said, "How do you do, Mr. Chillip?"

He was greatly fluttered by this unexpected address from a stranger, and replied, in his slow way, "I thank you, sir, you are very good. Thank you, sir. I hope *you* are well."

"You don't remember me?" said I.

"Well, sir," returned Mr. Chillip, smiling very meekly, and shaking his head as he surveyed me, "I have a kind of an impression that something in your countenance is familiar to me, sir; but I couldn't lay my hand upon your name, really."

"And yet you knew it, long before I knew it myself," I returned.

"Did I indeed, sir?" said Mr. Chillip. "Is it possible that I had the honor, sir, of officiating when —?"

"Yes," said I.

"Dear me!" cried Mr. Chillip. "But no doubt you are a good deal changed since then, sir?"

"Probably," said I.

"Well, sir," observed Mr. Chillip, "I hope you'll excuse me, if I am compelled to ask the favor of your name."

On my telling him my name, he was really moved. He quite shook hands with me — which was a violent proceeding for him, his usual course being to slide a tepid little fish-slice, an inch or two in advance of his hip, and evince the greatest discomposure when anybody grappled with it. Even now, he put his hand in his coat-pocket as soon as he could disengage it, and seemed relieved when he had got it safe back.

"Dear me, sir!" said Mr. Chillip, surveying me with his head on one side. "And it's Mr. Copperfield, is it? Well, sir, I think I should have known you, if I had taken the liberty of looking more closely at you. There's a strong resemblance between you and your poor father, sir."

"I never had the happiness of seeing my father," I observed.

"Very true, sir," said Mr. Chillip in a soothing tone. "And very much to be deplored it was, on all accounts! We are not ignorant, sir," said Mr. Chillip, slowly shaking his little head again, "down in our part of the country, of your fame. There must be great excitement here, sir," said Mr. Chillip, tapping himself on the forehead with his

forefinger. "You must find it a trying occupation, sir!"

"What is your part of the country now?" I asked, seating myself near him.

"I am established within a few miles of Bury St. Edmunds, sir," said Mr. Chillip. "Mrs. Chillip coming into a little property in that neighborhood, under her father's will, I bought a practice down there, in which you will be glad to hear I am doing well. My daughter is growing quite a tall lass, now, sir," said Mr. Chillip, giving his little head another little shake. "Her mother let down two tucks in her frocks only last week. Such is time, you see, sir!"

As the little man put his now empty glass to his lips when he made this reflection, I proposed to him to have it refilled, and I would keep him company with another. "Well, sir," he returned in his slow way, "it's more than I am accustomed to; but I can't deny myself the pleasure of your conversation. It seems but yesterday that I had the honor of attending you in the measles. You came through them charmingly, sir!"

I acknowledged this compliment, and ordered the negus, which was soon produced. "Quite an uncommon dissipation!" said Mr. Chillip, stirring it, "but I can't resist so extraordinary an occasion. You have no family, sir?"

I shook my head.

"I was aware that you sustained a bereavement, sir, some time ago," said Mr. Chillip. "I heard it from your father-in-law's sister. Very decided character there, sir?"

"Why, yes," said I, "decided enough. Where did you see her, Mr. Chillip?"

"Are you not aware, sir," returned Mr. Chillip with his placidest smile, "that your father-in-law is again a neighbor of mine?"

"No," said I.

"He is indeed, sir!" said Mr. Chillip. "Married a young lady of that part, with a very good little property, poor thing.—And this action of the brain now, sir? Don't you find it fatigue you?" said Mr. Chillip, looking at me like an admiring Robin.

I waived that question, and returned to the Murdstones. "I was aware of his being married again. Do you attend the family?"

"Not regularly. I have been called in," he replied. "Strong phrenological development of the organ of firmness in Mr. Murdstone and his sister, sir."

I replied with such an expressive look, that Mr. Chillip was emboldened by that, and the negus together, to give his head several short shakes, and thoughtfully exclaim, "Ah, dear me! We remember old times, Mr. Copperfield!"

"And the brother and sister are pursuing their old course, are they?" said I.

"Well, sir," replied Mr. Chillip, "a medical man, being so much in families, ought to have neither eyes nor ears for anything but his profession. Still, I must say, they are very severe, sir: both as to this life and the next."

"The next will be regulated without much reference to them, I dare say," I returned: "what are they doing as to this?"

Mr. Chillip shook his head, stirred his negus, and sipped it.

"She was a charming woman, sir!" he observed in a plaintive manner.

"The present Mrs. Murdstone?"

"A charming woman indeed, sir," said Mr. Chillip; "as amiable, I am sure, as it was possible to be! Mrs. Chillip's opinion is, that her spirit has been entirely broken since her marriage, and that she is all but melancholy mad. And the ladies," observed Mr. Chillip timorously, "are great observers, sir."

"I suppose she was to be subdued and broken to their detestable mould, Heaven help her!" said I. "And she has been."

"Well, sir, there were violent quarrels at first, I assure you," said Mr. Chillip; "but she is quite a shadow now. Would it be considered forward if I was to say to you, sir, in confidence, that since the sister came to help, the brother and sister between them have nearly reduced her to a state of imbecility?"

I told him I could easily believe it.

"I have no hesitation in saying," said Mr. Chillip, fortifying himself with another sip of negus, "between you and me, sir, that her mother died of it—or that tyranny, gloom, and worry have made Mrs. Murdstone nearly imbecile. She was a lively young woman, sir, before marriage, and their gloom and austerity destroyed her. They go about with her, now, more like her keepers than her husband and sister-in-law. That was Mrs. Chillip's remark to me, only last week. And I assure you, sir, the ladies are great observers. Mrs. Chillip herself is a *great* observer!"

"Does he gloomily profess to be (I am ashamed

to use the word in such association) religious still?" I inquired.

"You anticipate, sir," said Mr. Chillip, his eyelids getting quite red with the unwonted stimulus in which he was indulging. "One of Mrs. Chillip's most impressive remarks. Mrs. Chillip," he proceeded in the calmest and slowest manner, "quite electrified me by pointing out that Mr. Murdstone sets up an image of himself, and calls it the Divine Nature. You might have knocked me down on the flat of my back, sir, with the feather of a pen, I assure you, when Mrs. Chillip said so. The ladies are great observers, sir!"

"Intuitively," said I, to his extreme delight.

"I am very happy to receive such support in my opinion, sir," he rejoined. "It is not often that I venture to give a non-medical opinion, I assure you. Mr. Murdstone delivers public addresses sometimes, and it is said — in short, sir, it is said by Mrs. Chillip — that the darker tyrant he has lately been, the more ferocious is his doctrine."

"I believe Mrs. Chillip to be perfectly right," said I.

"Mrs. Chillip does go so far as to say," pursued the meekest of little men, much encouraged, "that what such people miscall their religion, is a vent for their bad humors and arrogance. And do you know I must say, sir," he continued, mildly laying his head on one side, "that I *don't* find authority for Mr. and Miss Murdstone in the New Testament!"

"I never found it either!" said I.

"In the mean time, sir," said Mr. Chillip, "they are much disliked; and, as they are very free in consigning everybody who dislikes them to perdi-

tion, we really have a good deal of perdition going on in our neighborhood! However, as Mrs. Chillip says, sir, they undergo a continual punishment; for they are turned inward, to feed upon their own hearts, and their own hearts are very bad feeding. Now, sir, about that brain of yours, if you'll excuse my returning to it. Don't you expose it to a good deal of excitement, sir?"

I found it not difficult, in the excitement of Mr. Chillip's own brain, under his potations of negus, to divert his attention from this topic to his own affairs, on which, for the next half-hour, he was quite loquacious; giving me to understand, among other pieces of information, that he was then at the Gray's Inn Coffee-house to lay his professional evidence before a Commission of Lunacy, touching the state of mind of a patient who had become deranged from excessive drinking.

"And I assure you, sir," he said, "I am extremely nervous on such occasions. I could not support being what is called Bullied, sir. It would quite unman me. Do you know it was some time before I recovered the conduct of that alarming lady, on the night of your birth, Mr. Copperfield!"

I told him that I was going down to my aunt, the Dragon of that night, early in the morning; and that she was one of the most tender-hearted and excellent of women, as he would know full well if he knew her better. The mere notion of the possibility of his ever seeing her again appeared to terrify him. He replied, with a small pale smile, "Is she so indeed, sir? Really?" and almost immediately called for a candle, and went to bed, as if he were not quite safe anywhere else. He did not actu-

ally stagger under the negus ; but I should think his placid little pulse must have made two or three more beats in a minute than it had done since the great night of my aunt's disappointment, when she struck at him with her bonnet.

Thoroughly tired, I went to bed too at midnight ; passed the next day on the Dover coach ; burst safe and sound into my aunt's old parlor while she was at tea (she wore spectacles now) ; and was received by her, and Mr. Dick, and dear old Peggotty, who acted as housekeeper, with open arms and tears of joy. My aunt was mightily amused, when we began to talk composedly, by my account of my meeting with Mr. Chillip, and of his holding her in such dread remembrance ; and both she and Peggotty had a great deal to say about my poor mother's second husband, and "that murdering woman of a sister," — on whom I think no pain or penalty would have induced my aunt to bestow any Christian or Proper Name, or any other designation.

CHAPTER XXI.

AGNES.

My aunt and I, when we were left alone, talked far into the night. How the emigrants never wrote home otherwise than cheerfully and hopefully; how Mr. Micawber had actually remitted divers small sums of money, on account of those "pecuniary liabilities," in reference to which he had been so business-like as between man and man; how Janet, returning into my aunt's service when she came back to Dover, had finally carried out her renunciation of mankind by entering into wedlock with a thriving tavern-keeper; and how my aunt had finally set *her* seal on the same great principle, by aiding and abetting the bride, and crowning the marriage ceremony with her presence; were among our topics — already more or less familiar to me through the letters I had had. Mr. Dick, as usual, was not forgotten. My aunt informed me how he incessantly occupied himself in copying everything he could lay his hands on, and kept King Charles the First at a respectful distance by that semblance of employment; how it was one of the main joys and rewards of her life that he was free and happy, instead of pining in monotonous restraint; and how (as a

novel general conclusion) nobody but she could ever fully know what he was.

"And when, Trot," said my aunt, patting the back of my hand, as we sat in our old way before the fire, "when are you going over to Canterbury?"

"I shall get a horse, and ride over to-morrow morning, aunt, unless you will go with me?"

"No!" said my aunt in her short, abrupt way. "I mean to stay where I am."

Then, I should ride, I said. I could not have come through Canterbury to-day without stopping, if I had been coming to any one but her.

She was pleased, but answered, "Tut, Trot; *my* old bones would have kept till to-morrow!" and softly patted my hand again as I sat looking thoughtfully at the fire.

Thoughtfully, for I could not be here once more, and so near Agnes, without the revival of those regrets with which I had so long been occupied. Softened regrets they might be, teaching me what I had failed to learn when my younger life was all before me, but not the less regrets. "Oh, Trot!" I seemed to hear my aunt say once more; and I understood her better now — "blind, blind, blind!"

We both kept silence for some minutes. When I raised my eyes, I found that she was steadily observant of me. Perhaps she had followed the current of my mind; for it seemed to me an easy one to track now, wilful as it had been once.

"You will find her father a white-haired old man," said my aunt, "though a better man in all other respects — a reclaimed man. Neither will you find him measuring all human interests, and joys, and sorrows, with his one poor little inch-rule

now. Trust me, child, such things must shrink very much, before they can be measured off in *that* way."

"Indeed they must," said I.

"You will find her," pursued my aunt, "as good, as beautiful, as earnest, as disinterested, as she has always been. If I knew higher praise, Trot, I would bestow it on her."

There was no higher praise for her; no higher reproach for me. Oh, how had I strayed so far away!

"If she trains the young girls whom she has about her to be like herself," said my aunt, earnest even to the filling of her eyes with tears, "Heaven knows, her life will be well employed! Useful and happy, as she said that day! How could she be otherwise than useful and happy?"

"Has Agnes any —" I was thinking aloud, rather than speaking.

"Well? Hey? Any what?" said my aunt sharply.

"Any lover," said I.

"A score," cried my aunt, with a kind of indignant pride. "She might have married twenty times, my dear, since you have been gone!"

"No doubt," said I. "No doubt. But has she any lover who is worthy of her? Agnes could care for no other."

My aunt sat musing for a little while, with her chin upon her hand. Slowly raising her eyes to mine, she said, —

"I suspect she has an attachment, Trot."

"A prosperous one?" said I.

"Trot," returned my aunt gravely, "I can't say. I have no right to tell you even so much. She has never confided it to me, but I suspect it."

She looked so attentively and anxiously at me (I even saw her tremble), that I felt now, more than ever, that she had followed my late thoughts. I summoned all the resolutions I had made, in all those many days and nights, and all those many conflicts of my heart.

"If it should be so," I began, "and I hope it is —"

"I don't know that it is," said my aunt curtly. "You must not be ruled by my suspicions. You must keep them secret. They are very slight, perhaps. I have no right to speak."

"If it should be so," I repeated, "Agnes will tell me at her own good time. A sister to whom I have confided so much, aunt, will not be reluctant to confide in me."

My aunt withdrew her eyes from mine as slowly as she had turned them upon me; and covered them thoughtfully with her hand. By and by she put her other hand on my shoulder; and so we both sat looking into the past, without saying another word, until we parted for the night.

I rode away, early in the morning, for the scene of my old school days. I cannot say that I was yet quite happy, in the hope that I was gaining a victory over myself; even in the prospect of so soon looking on her face again.

The well-remembered ground was soon traversed, and I came into the quiet streets, where every stone was a boy's book to me. I went on foot to the old house, and went away with a heart too full to enter. I returned; and looking, as I passed, through the low window of the turret-room where first Uriah Heep, and afterwards Mr. Micawber, had been wont

to sit, saw that it was a little parlor now, and that there was no office. Otherwise the staid old house was, as to its cleanliness and order, still just as it had been when I first saw it. I requested the new maid who admitted me to tell Miss Wickfield that a gentleman who waited on her from a friend abroad was there; and I was shown up the grave old staircase (cautioned of the steps I knew so well), into the unchanged drawing-room. The books that Agnes and I had read together were on their shelves; and the desk where I had labored at my lessons, many a night, stood yet at the same old corner of the table. All the little changes that had crept in when the Heeps were there were changed again. Everything was as it used to be in the happy time.

I stood in a window, and looked across the ancient street at the opposite houses, recalling how I had watched them on wet afternoons, when I first came there; and how I had used to speculate about the people who appeared at any of the windows, and had followed them with my eyes up and down stairs, while women went clinking along the pavement in pattens, and the dull rain fell in slanting lines, and poured out of the water-spout yonder, and flowed into the road. The feeling with which I used to watch the tramps, as they came into the town on those wet evenings at dusk, and limped past, with their bundles drooping over their shoulders at the ends of sticks, came freshly back to me; fraught, as then, with the smell of damp earth, and wet leaves and brier, and the sensation of the very airs that blew upon me in my own toilsome journey.

The opening of the little door in the panelled wall made me start and turn. Her beautiful serene

eyes met mine as she came towards me. She stopped, and laid her hand upon her bosom, and I caught her in my arms.

"Agnes! my dear girl! I have come too suddenly upon you."

"No, no! I am so rejoiced to see you, Trotwood!"

"Dear Agnes, the happiness it is to me to see you once again!"

I folded her to my heart, and for a little while we were both silent. Presently we sat down, side by side; and her angel face was turned upon me with the welcome I had dreamed of, waking and sleeping, for whole years.

She was so true, she was so beautiful, she was so good, — I owed her so much gratitude, she was so dear to me, that I could find no utterance for what I felt. I tried to bless her, tried to thank her, tried to tell her (as I had often done in letters) what an influence she had upon me; but all my efforts were in vain. My love and joy were dumb.

With her own sweet tranquillity she calmed my agitation; led me back to the time of our parting; spoke to me of Emily, whom she had visited, in secret, many times; spoke to me tenderly of Dora's grave. With the unerring instinct of her noble heart, she touched the chords of my memory so softly and harmoniously, that not one jarred within me; I could listen to the sorrowful, distant music, and desire to shrink from nothing it awoke. How could I, when, blended with it all, was her dear self, the better angel of my life?

"And you, Agnes," I said by and by. "Tell me of yourself. You have hardly ever told me of your own life, in all this lapse of time!"

"What should I tell?" she answered with her radiant smile. "Papa is well. You see us here, quiet in our own home; our anxieties set at rest, our home restored to us: and knowing that, dear Trotwood, you know all."

"All, Agnes?" said I.

She looked at me with some fluttering wonder in her face.

"Is there nothing else, Sister?" I said.

Her color, which had just now faded, returned, and faded again. She smiled; with a quiet sadness, I thought; and shook her head.

I had sought to lead her to what my aunt had hinted at; for, sharply painful to me as it must be to receive that confidence, I was to discipline my heart, and do my duty to her. I saw, however, that she was uneasy, and I let it pass.

"You have much to do, dear Agnes?"

"With my school?" said she, looking up again in all her bright composure.

"Yes. It is laborious, is it not?"

"The labor is so pleasant," she returned, "that it is scarcely grateful in me to call it by that name."

"Nothing good is difficult to you," said I.

Her color came and went once more; and once more, as she bent her head, I saw the same sad smile.

"You will wait and see papa," said Agnes cheerfully, "and pass the day with us? Perhaps you will sleep in your own room? We always call it yours."

I could not do that, having promised to ride back to my aunt's at night; but I would pass the day there joyfully.

"I must be a prisoner for a little while," said

Agnes, "but here are the old books, Trotwood, and the old music."

"Even the old flowers are here," said I, looking round; "or the old kinds."

"I have found a pleasure," returned Agnes, smiling, "while you have been absent, in keeping everything as it used to be when we were children. For we were very happy then, I think."

"Heaven knows we were!" said I.

"And every little thing that has reminded me of my brother," said Agnes, with her cordial eyes turned cheerfully upon me, "has been a welcome companion. Even this," showing me the basket trifle full of keys, still hanging at her side, "seems to jingle a kind of old tune!"

She smiled again, and went out at the door by which she had come.

It was for me to guard this sisterly affection with religious care. It was all that I had left myself, and it was a treasure. If I once shook the foundations of the sacred confidence and usage, in virtue of which it was given to me, it was lost, and could never be recovered. I set this steadily before myself. The better I loved her, the more it behooved me never to forget it.

I walked through the streets; and, once more seeing my old adversary the butcher — now a constable, with his staff hanging up in the shop — went down to look at the place where I had fought him; and there meditated on Miss Shepherd and the eldest Miss Larkins, and all the idle loves and likings, and dislikings, of that time. Nothing seemed to have survived that time but Agnes; and she, ever a star above me, was brighter and higher.

When I returned, Mr. Wickfield had come home from a garden he had, a couple of miles or so out of the town, where he now employed himself almost every day. I found him as my aunt had described him. We sat down to dinner, with some half-dozen little girls; and he seemed but the shadow of his handsome picture on the wall.

The tranquillity and peace belonging, of old, to that quiet ground in my memory, pervaded it again. When dinner was done, Mr. Wickfield taking no wine, and I desiring none, we went upstairs; where Agnes and her little charges sang and played, and worked. After tea the children left us; and we three sat together, talking of the bygone days.

"My part in them," said Mr. Wickfield, shaking his white head, "has much matter for regret — for deep regret, and deep contrition, Trotwood, you well know. But I would not cancel it, if it were in my power."

I could readily believe that, looking at the face beside him.

"I should cancel with it," he pursued, "such patience and devotion, such fidelity, such a child's love, as I must not forget, no! even to forget myself."

"I understand you, sir," I softly said. "I hold it — I have always held it — in veneration."

"But no one knows, not even you," he returned, "how much she has done, how much she has undergone, how hard she has striven. Dear Agnes!"

She put her hand entreatingly on his arm, to stop him; and was very, very pale.

"Well, well!" he said with a sigh, dismissing, as I then saw, some trial she had borne, or was

yet to bear, in connection with what my aunt had told me. "Well! I have never told you, Trotwood, of her mother. Has any one?"

"Never, sir."

"It's not much — though it was much to suffer. She married me in opposition to her father's wish, and he renounced her. She prayed him to forgive her, before my Agnes came into this world. He was a very hard man, and her mother had long been dead. He repulsed her. He broke her heart."

Agnes leaned upon his shoulder, and stole her arm about his neck.

"She had an affectionate and gentle heart," he said; "and it was broken. I knew its tender nature very well. No one could, if I did not. She loved me dearly, but was never happy. She was always laboring, in secret, under this distress; and being delicate and downcast at the time of his last repulse — for it was not the first, by many — pined away and died. She left me Agnes, two weeks old; and the gray hair that you recollect me with when you first came."

He kissed Agnes on her cheek.

"My love for my dear child was a diseased love, but my mind was all unhealthy then. I say no more of that. I am not speaking of myself, Trotwood, but of her mother, and of her. If I give you any clew to what I am, or to what I have been, you will unravel it, I know. What Agnes is, I need not say. I have always read something of her poor mother's story in her character; and so I tell it you to-night, when we three are again together, after such great changes. I have told it all."

His bowed head, and her angel face and filial duty derived a more pathetic meaning from it than they had had before. If I had wanted anything by which to mark this night of our re-union, I should have found it in this.

Agnes rose up from her father's side before long; and, going softly to her piano, played some of the old airs to which we had often listened in that place.

"Have you any intention of going away again?" Agnes asked me as I was standing by.

"What does my sister say to that?"

"I hope not."

"Then I have no such intention, Agnes."

"I think you ought not, Trotwood, since you ask me," she said mildly. "Your growing reputation and success enlarge your power of doing good; and if I could spare my brother," with her eyes upon me, "perhaps the time could not."

"What I am you have made me, Agnes. You should know best."

"I made you, Trotwood?"

"Yes! Agnes, my dear girl!" I said, bending over her. "I tried to tell you, when we met to-day, something that has been in my thoughts since Dora died. You remember when you came down to me in our little room — pointing upward, Agnes?"

"Oh, Trotwood!" she returned, her eyes filled with tears. "So loving, so confiding, and so young! Can I ever forget?"

"As you were then, my sister, I have often thought since, you have ever been to me. Ever pointing upward, Agnes; ever leading me to something better; ever directing me to higher things!"

She only shook her head : through her tears I saw the same sad, quiet smile.

"And I am so grateful to you for it, Agnes, so bound to you, that there is no name for the affection of my heart. I want you to know, yet don't know how to tell you, that all my life long I shall look up to you, and be guided by you, as I have been through the darkness that is past. Whatever betides, whatever new ties you may form, whatever changes may come between us, I shall always look to you, and love you, as I do now, and have always done. You will always be my solace and my resource, as you have always been. Until I die, my dearest sister, I shall see you always before me, pointing upward!"

She put her hand in mine, and told me she was proud of me, and of what I said ; although I praised her very far beyond her worth. Then she went on softly playing, but without removing her eyes from me.

"Do you know, what I have heard to-night, Agnes," said I, "strangely seems to be a part of the feeling with which I regarded you when I saw you first — with which I sat beside you in my rough school days?"

"You knew I had no mother," she replied with a smile, "and felt kindly towards me."

"More than that, Agnes, I knew, almost as if I had known this story, that there was something inexplicably gentle and softened surrounding you ; something that might have been sorrowful in some one else (as I can now understand it was), but was not so in you."

She softly played on, looking at me still.

"Will you laugh at my cherishing such fancies, Agnes?"

“No!”

“Or at my saying that I really believe I felt, even then, that you could be faithfully affectionate against all discouragement, and never cease to be so, until you cease to live? — Will you laugh at such a dream?”

“Oh no! Oh no!”

For an instant a distressful shadow crossed her face; but, even in the start it gave me, it was gone; and she was playing on, and looking at me with her own calm smile.

As I rode back in the lonely night, the wind going by me like a restless memory, I thought of this, and feared she was not happy. *I* was not happy; but, thus far, I had faithfully set the seal upon the Past, and, thinking of her, pointing upward, thought of her as pointing to that sky above me, where, in the mystery to come, I might yet love her with a love unknown on earth, and tell her what the strife had been within me when I loved her here.

CHAPTER XXII.

I AM SHOWN TWO INTERESTING PENITENTS.

For a time — at all events, until my book should be completed, which would be the work of several months — I took up my abode in my aunt's house at Dover; and there, sitting in the window from which I had looked out at the moon upon the sea, when that roof first gave me shelter, I quietly pursued my task.

In pursuance of my intention of referring to my own fictions only when their course should incidentally connect itself with the progress of my story, I do not enter on the aspirations, the delights, anxieties, and triumphs of my art. That I truly devoted myself to it with my strongest earnestness, and bestowed upon it every energy of my soul, I have already said. If the books I have written be of any worth, they will supply the rest. I shall otherwise have written to poor purpose, and the rest will be of interest to no one.

Occasionally I went to London; to lose myself in the swarm of life there, or to consult with Traddles on some business point. He had managed for me, in my absence, with the soundest judgment; and my worldly affairs were prospering. As my noto-

riety began to bring upon me an enormous quantity of letters from people of whom I had no knowledge — chiefly about nothing, and extremely difficult to answer — I agreed with Traddles to have my name painted up on his door. There, the devoted postman on that beat delivered bushels of letters for me; and there, at intervals, I labored through them, like a Home Secretary of State without the salary.

Among this correspondence there dropped in, every now and then, an obliging proposal, from one of the numerous outsiders always lurking about the Commons, to practise under cover of my name (if I would take the necessary steps remaining to make a proctor of myself), and pay me a percentage on the profits. But I declined these offers; being already aware that there were plenty of such covert practitioners in existence, and considering the Commons quite bad enough, without my doing anything to make it worse.

The girls had gone home when my name burst into bloom on Traddles's door; and the sharp boy looked, all day, as if he had never heard of Sophy, shut up in a back room, glancing down from her work into a sooty little strip of garden with a pump in it. But, there I always found her, the same bright housewife; often humming her Devonshire ballads when no strange foot was coming up the stairs, and blunting the sharp boy in his official closet with melody.

I wondered, at first, why I so often found Sophy writing in a copy-book; and why she always shut it up when I appeared, and hurried it into the table drawer. But the secret soon came out. One day, Traddles (who had just come home through the

drizzling sleet from Court) took a paper out of his desk, and asked me what I thought of that handwriting?

"Oh, *don't*, Tom!" cried Sophy, who was warming his slippers before the fire.

"My dear," returned Tom in a delighted state, "why not? What do you say to that writing, Copperfield?"

"It's extraordinarily legal and formal," said I. "I don't think I ever saw such a stiff hand."

"Not like a lady's hand, is it?" said Traddles.

"A lady's!" I repeated. "Bricks and mortar are more like a lady's hand!"

Traddles broke into a rapturous laugh, and informed me that it was Sophy's writing; that Sophy had vowed and declared he would need a copying clerk soon, and she would be that clerk; that she had acquired this hand from a pattern; and that she could throw off—I forget how many folios an hour. Sophy was very much confused by my being told all this, and said that when "Tom" was made a judge he wouldn't be so ready to proclaim it. Which "Tom" denied; averring that he should always be equally proud of it, under all circumstances.

"What a thoroughly good and charming wife she is, my dear Traddles!" said I, when she had gone away laughing.

"My dear Copperfield," returned Traddles, "she is, without any exception, the dearest girl! The way she manages this place; her punctuality, domestic knowledge, economy, and order; her cheerfulness, Copperfield!"

"Indeed, you have reason to commend her!" I

returned. "You are a happy fellow. I believe you make yourselves, and each other, two of the happiest people in the world."

"I am sure we *are* two of the happiest people," returned Traddles. "I admit that, at all events. Bless my soul, when I see her getting up by candle-light on these dark mornings, busying herself in the day's arrangements, going out to market before the clerks come into the Inn, caring for no weather, devising the most capital little dinners out of the plainest materials, making puddings and pies, keeping everything in its right place, always so neat and ornamental herself, sitting up at night with me if it's ever so late, sweet-tempered and encouraging always, and all for me, I positively sometimes can't believe it, Copperfield!"

He was tender of the very slippers she had been warming, as he put them on, and stretched his feet enjoyingly upon the fender.

"I positively sometimes can't believe it," said Traddles. "Then, our pleasures! Dear me, they are inexpensive, but they are quite wonderful! When we are at home here, of an evening, and shut the outer door, and draw those curtains — which she made — where could we be more snug? When it's fine, and we go out for a walk in the evening, the streets abound in enjoyment for us. We look into the glittering windows of the jewellers' shops; and I show Sophy which of the diamond-eyed serpents, coiled up on white satin rising grounds, I would give her if I could afford it; and Sophy shows me which of the gold watches that are capped and jewelled and engine-turned, and possessed of the horizontal lever-escape movement, and all sorts of things,

she would buy for me if *she* could afford it ; and we pick out the spoons and forks, fish-slices, butter-knives, and sugar-tongs we should both prefer if we could both afford it ; and really we go away as if we had got them ! Then, when we stroll into the squares, and great streets, and see a house to let, sometimes we look up at it, and say, How would *that* do, if I was made a judge ? And we parcel it out — such a room for us, such rooms for the girls, and so forth ; until we settle to our satisfaction that it would do, or it wouldn't do, as the case may be. Sometimes, we go at half-price to the pit of the theatre — the very smell of which is cheap, in my opinion, at the money — and there we thoroughly enjoy the play : which Sophy believes every word of, and so do I. In walking home, perhaps we buy a little bit of something at a cook's shop, or a little lobster at the fishmonger's, and bring it here, and make a splendid supper, chatting about what we have seen. Now, you know, Copperfield, if I was Lord Chancellor, we couldn't do this ! ”

“ You would do something, whatever you were, my dear Traddles,” thought I, “ that would be pleasant and amiable ! And by the way,” I said aloud, “ I suppose you never draw any skeletons now ? ”

“ Really,” replied Traddles, laughing and reddening, “ I can't wholly deny that I do, my dear Copperfield. For, being in one of the back rows of the King's Bench the other day, with a pen in hand, the fancy came into my head to try how I had preserved that accomplishment. And I am afraid there's a skeleton — in a wig — on the ledge of the desk.”

After we had both laughed heartily, Traddles

wound up by looking with a smile at the fire, and saying, in his forgiving way, "Old Creakle!"

"I have a letter from that old — Rascal here," said I. For I never was less disposed to forgive him the way he used to batter Traddles than when I saw Traddles so ready to forgive him himself.

"From Creakle the schoolmaster?" exclaimed Traddles. "No!"

"Among the persons who are attracted to me in my rising fame and fortune," said I, looking over my letters, "and who discover that they were always much attached to me, is the selfsame Creakle. He is not a schoolmaster now, Traddles. He is retired. He is a Middlesex Magistrate."

I thought Traddles might be surprised to hear it, but he was not so at all.

"How do you suppose he comes to be a Middlesex Magistrate?" said I.

"Oh dear me!" replied Traddles, "it would be very difficult to answer that question. Perhaps he voted for somebody, or lent money to somebody, or bought something of somebody, or otherwise obliged somebody, or jobbed for somebody, who knew somebody who got the lieutenant of the county to nominate him for the commission."

"On the commission he is, at any rate," said I. "And he writes to me here, that he will be glad to show me, in operation, the only true system of prison discipline; the only unchallengeable way of making sincere and lasting converts and penitents — which, you know, is by solitary confinement. What do you say?"

"To the system?" inquired Traddles, looking grave.

"No. To my accepting the offer, and your going with me?"

"I don't object," said Traddles.

"Then I'll write to say so. You remember (to say nothing of our treatment) this same Creakle turning his son out of doors, I suppose, and the life he used to lead his wife and daughter?"

"Perfectly," said Traddles.

"Yet, if you'll read his letter, you'll find he is the tenderest of men to prisoners convicted of the whole calendar of felonies," said I; "though I can't find that his tenderness extends to any other class of created beings."

Traddles shrugged his shoulders, and was not at all surprised. I had not expected him to be, and was not surprised myself; or my observation of similar practical satires would have been but scanty. We arranged the time of our visit, and I wrote accordingly to Mr. Creakle that evening.

On the appointed day—I think it was the next day, but no matter—Traddles and I repaired to the prison where Mr. Creakle was powerful. It was an immense and solid building, erected at a vast expense. I could not help thinking, as we approached the gate, what an uproar would have been made in the country, if any deluded man had proposed to spend one-half the money it had cost on the erection of an industrial school for the young, or a house of refuge for the deserving old.

In an office that might have been on the ground-floor of the Tower of Babel, it was so massively constructed, we were presented to our old school-master; who was one of a group, composed of two or three of the busier sort of magistrates, and

some visitors they had brought. He received me like a man who had formed my mind in bygone years, and had always loved me tenderly. On my introducing Traddles, Mr. Creakle expressed, in like manner, but in an inferior degree, that he had always been Traddles's guide, philosopher, and friend. Our venerable instructor was a great deal older, and not improved in appearance. His face was as fiery as ever; his eyes were as small, and rather deeper set. The scanty, wet-looking gray hair, by which I remembered him, was almost gone; and the thick veins in his bald head were none the more agreeable to look at.

After some conversation among these gentlemen, from which I might have supposed that there was nothing in the world to be legitimately taken into account but the supreme comfort of prisoners, at any expense, and nothing on the wide earth to be done outside prison doors, we began our inspection. It being then just dinner-time, we went, first into the great kitchen, where every prisoner's dinner was in course of being set out separately (to be handed to him in his cell), with the regularity and precision of clockwork. I said aside, to Traddles, that I wondered whether it occurred to anybody that there was a striking contrast between these plentiful repasts of choice quality and the dinners, not to say of paupers, but of soldiers, sailors, laborers, the great bulk of the honest, working community; of whom not one man in five hundred ever dined half so well. But I learned that the "system" required high living; and, in short, to dispose of the system, once for all, I found that on that head, and on all others, "the system" put an end to

all doubts, and disposed of all anomalies. Nobody appeared to have the least idea that there was any other system but *the* system to be considered.

As we were going through some of the magnificent passages, I inquired of Mr. Creakle and his friends what were supposed to be the main advantages of this all-governing and universally overriding system? I found them to be the perfect isolation of prisoners — so that no one man in confinement there knew anything about another; and the reduction of prisoners to a wholesome state of mind, leading to sincere contrition and repentance.

Now, it struck me, when we began to visit individuals in their cells, and to traverse the passages in which those cells were, and to have the manner of the going to chapel, and so forth, explained to us, that there was a strong probability of the prisoners knowing a good deal about each other, and of their carrying on a pretty complete system of intercourse. This, at the time I write, has been proved, I believe, to be the case; but, as it would have been flat blasphemy against the system to have hinted such a doubt then, I looked out for the penitence as diligently as I could.

And here, again, I had great misgivings. I found as prevalent a fashion in the form of the penitence as I had left outside in the forms of the coats and waistcoats in the windows of the tailors' shops. I found a vast amount of profession, varying very little in character: varying very little (which I thought exceedingly suspicious) even in words. I found a great many foxes, disparaging whole vineyards of inaccessible grapes; but I found very few foxes whom I would have trusted within reach of a

bunch. Above all, I found that the most professing men were the greatest objects of interest; and that their conceit, their vanity, their want of excitement, and their love of deception (which many of them possessed to an almost incredible extent, as their histories showed), all prompted to these professions, and were all gratified by them.

However, I heard so repeatedly, in the course of our goings to and fro, of a certain Number Twenty-Seven, who was the favorite, and who really appeared to be a Model Prisoner, that I resolved to suspend my judgment until I should see Twenty-Seven. Twenty-Eight, I understood, was also a bright particular star; but it was his misfortune to have his glory a little dimmed by the extraordinary lustre of Twenty-Seven. I heard so much of Twenty-Seven — of his pious admonitions to everybody around him, and of the beautiful letters he constantly wrote to his mother (whom he seemed to consider in a very bad way), that I became quite impatient to see him.

I had to restrain my impatience for some time, on account of Twenty-Seven being reserved for a concluding effect. But, at last, we came to the door of his cell; and Mr. Creakle, looking through a little hole in it, reported to us, in a state of the greatest admiration, that he was reading a Hymn Book.

There was such a rush of heads immediately to see Number Twenty-Seven reading his Hymn Book, that the little hole was blocked up, six or seven heads deep. To remedy this inconvenience, and give us an opportunity of conversing with Twenty-Seven in all his purity, Mr. Creakle directed the door of the cell to be unlocked, and Twenty-Seven

to be invited out into the passage. This was done, and whom should Traddles and I then behold, to our amazement, in this converted Number Twenty-Seven, but Uriah Heep!

He knew us directly, and said, as he came out — with the old writhe —

“How do you do, Mr. Copperfield? How do you do, Mr. Traddles?”

This recognition caused a general admiration in the party. I rather thought that every one was struck by his not being proud, and taking notice of us.

“Well, Twenty-Seven!” said Mr. Creakle, mournfully admiring him. “How do you find yourself to-day?”

“I am very umble, sir!” replied Uriah Heep.

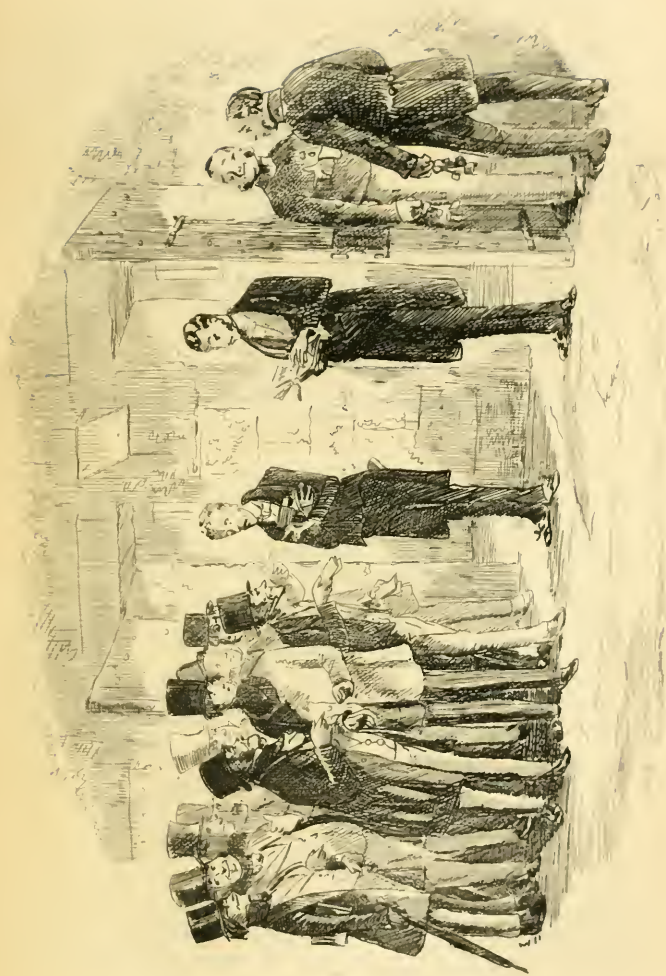
“You are always so, Twenty-Seven,” said Mr. Creakle.

Here another gentleman asked, with extreme anxiety: “Are you quite comfortable?”

“Yes, I thank you, sir!” said Uriah Heep, looking in that direction. “Far more comfortable here than ever I was outside. I see my follies now, sir. That’s what makes me comfortable.”

Several gentlemen were much affected; and a third questioner, forcing himself to the front, inquired, with extreme feeling: “How do you find the beef?”

“Thank you, sir,” replied Uriah, glancing in the new direction of this voice, “it was tougher yesterday than I could wish; but it’s my duty to bear. I have committed follies, gentlemen,” said Uriah, looking round with a meek smile, “and I ought to bear the consequences without repining.”



A murmur, partly of gratification at Twenty-Seven's celestial state of mind, and partly of indignation against the Contractor who had given him any cause of complaint (a note of which was immediately made by Mr. Creakle), having subsided, Twenty-Seven stood in the midst of us, as if he felt himself the principal object of merit in a highly meritorious museum. That we, the neophytes, might have an excess of light shining upon us all at once, orders were given to let out Twenty-Eight.

I had been so much astonished already that I only felt a kind of resigned wonder when Mr. Littimer walked forth, reading a good book !

"Twenty-Eight," said a gentleman in spectacles, who had not yet spoken, "you complained last week, my good fellow, of the cocoa. How has it been since ? "

"I thank you, sir," said Mr. Littimer, "it has been better made. If I might take the liberty of saying so, sir, I don't think the milk which is boiled with it is quite genuine ; but I am aware, sir, that there is great adulteration of milk in London, and that the article in a pure state is difficult to be obtained."

It appeared to me that the gentleman in spectacles backed his Twenty-Eight against Mr. Creakle's Twenty-Seven, for each of them took his own man in hand.

"What is your state of mind, Twenty-Eight ? " said the questioner in spectacles.

"I thank you, sir," returned Mr. Littimer ; "I see my follies now, sir. I am a good deal troubled when I think of the sins of my former companions, sir ; but I trust they may find forgiveness."

"You are quite happy yourself?" said the questioner, nodding encouragement.

"I am much obliged to you, sir," returned Mr. Littimer. "Perfectly so."

"Is there anything at all on your mind now?" said the questioner. "If so, mention it, Twenty-Eight."

"Sir," said Mr. Littimer, without looking up, "if my eyes have not deceived me, there is a gentleman present who was acquainted with me in my former life. It may be profitable to that gentleman to know, sir, that I attribute my past follies entirely to having lived a thoughtless life in the service of young men: and to having allowed myself to be led by them into weaknesses, which I had not the strength to resist. I hope that gentleman will take warning, sir, and will not be offended at my freedom. It is for his good. I am conscious of my own past follies. I hope he may repent of all the wickedness and sin to which he has been a party."

I observed that several gentlemen were shading their eyes, each with one hand, as if they had just come into church.

"This does you credit, Twenty-Eight," returned the questioner. "I should have expected it of you. Is there anything else?"

"Sir," returned Mr. Littimer, slightly lifting up his eyebrows, but not his eyes, "there was a young woman who fell into dissolute courses, that I endeavored to save, sir, but could not rescue. I beg that gentleman, if he has it in his power, to inform that young woman from me that I forgive her her bad conduct towards myself; and that I call her to repentance—if he will be so good."

"I have no doubt, Twenty-Eight," returned the questioner, "that the gentleman you refer to feels very strongly — as we all must — what you have so properly said. We will not detain you."

"I thank you, sir," said Mr. Littimer. "Gentlemen, I wish you a good-day, and hoping you and your families will also see your wickedness, and amend!"

With this, Number Twenty-Eight retired, after a glance between him and Uriah, as if they were not altogether unknown to each other, through some medium of communication; and a murmur went round the group, as his door shut upon him, that he was a most respectable man, and a beautiful case.

"Now, Twenty-Seven," said Mr. Creakle, entering on a clear stage with *his* man, "is there anything that any one can do for you? If so, mention it."

"I would umbly ask, sir," returned Uriah, with a jerk of his malevolent head, "for leave to write again to mother."

"It shall certainly be granted," said Mr. Creakle.

"Thank you, sir! I am anxious about mother. I am afraid she ain't safe."

Somebody incautiously asked, What from? But there was a scandalized whisper of "Hush!"

"Immortally safe, sir," returned Uriah, writhing in the direction of the voice. "I should wish mother to be got into my state. I never should have been got into my present state if I hadn't come here. I wish mother had come here. It would be better for everybody if they got took up, and was brought here."

This sentiment gave unbounded satisfaction — greater satisfaction, I think, than anything that had passed yet.

•

"Before I come here," said Uriah, stealing a look at us, as if he would have blighted the outer world to which we belonged, if he could, "I was given to follies; but now I am sensible of my follies. There's a deal of sin outside. There's a deal of sin in mother. There's nothing but sin everywhere — except here."

"You are quite changed?" said Mr. Creakle.

"Oh dear yes, sir!" cried this hopeful penitent.

"You wouldn't relapse, if you were going out?" asked somebody else.

"Oh de-ar no, sir!"

"Well!" said Mr. Creakle, "this is very gratifying. You have addressed Mr. Copperfield, Twenty-Seven. Do you wish to say anything further to him?"

"You knew me a long time before I came here and was changed, Mr. Copperfield," said Uriah, looking at me; and a more villanous look I never saw, even on his visage. "You knew me when, in spite of my follies, I was umble among them that was proud, and meek among them that was violent — you was violent to me yourself, Mr. Copperfield. Once, you struck me a blow in the face, you know."

General commiseration. Several indignant glances directed at me.

"But I forgive you, Mr. Copperfield," said Uriah, making his forgiving nature the subject of a most impious and awful parallel, which I shall not record. "I forgive everybody. It would ill become me to bear malice. I freely forgive you, and I hope you'll curb your passions in future. I hope Mr. W. will repent, and Miss W., and all of that sinful lot. You've been visited with affliction, and I hope it

may do you good ; but you'd better have come here. Mr. W. had better have come here, and Miss W. too. The best wish I could give you, Mr. Copperfield, and give all of you gentlemen, is, that you could be took up and brought here. When I think of my past follies, and my present state, I am sure it would be best for you. I pity all who ain't brought here ! ”

He sneaked back into his cell, amidst a little chorus of approbation ; and both Traddles and I experienced a great relief when he was locked in.

It was a characteristic feature in this repentance, that I was fain to ask what these two men had done, to be there at all. That appeared to be the last thing about which they had anything to say. I addressed myself to one of the two warders, who, I suspected, from certain latent indications in their faces, knew pretty well what all this stir was worth.

“Do you know,” said I as we walked along the passage, “what felony was Number Twenty-Seven’s last ‘folly’ ?”

The answer was that it was a Bank case.

“A fraud on the Bank of England ? ” I asked.

“Yes, sir. Fraud, forgery, and conspiracy. He and some others. He set the others on. It was a deep plot for a large sum. Sentence, transportation for life. Twenty-Seven was the knowingest bird of the lot, and had very nearly kept himself safe ; but not quite. The Bank was just able to put salt upon his tail—and only just.”

“Do you know Twenty-Eight’s offence ? ”

“Twenty-Eight,” returned my informant, speaking throughout in a low tone, and looking over his shoulder as we walked along the passage, to guard

himself from being overheard in such an unlawful reference to these Inmaculates, by Creakle and the rest; "Twenty-Eight (also transportation) got a place, and robbed a young master of a matter of two hundred and fifty pounds in money and valuables, the night before they were going abroad. I particularly recollect his case from his being took by a dwarf."

"A what?"

"A little woman. I have forgot her name."

"Not Mowcher?"

"That's it! He had eluded pursuit, and was going to America in a flaxen wig and whiskers, and such a complete disguise as never you see in all your born days; when the little woman, being in Southampton, met him walking along the street—picked him out with her sharp eye in a moment—ran betwixt his legs to upset him—and held on to him like grim Death."

"Excellent Miss Mowcher!" cried I.

"You'd have said so if you had seen her, standing on a chair in the witness-box at his trial, as I did," said my friend. "He cut her face right open, and pounded her in the most brutal manner, when she took him; but she never loosed her hold till he was locked up. She held so tight to him, in fact, that the officers were obliged to take 'em both together. She gave her evidence in the gamest way, and was highly complimented by the Bench, and cheered right home to her lodgings. She said in court that she'd have took him single-handed (on account of what she knew concerning him), if he had been Samson. And it's my belief she would!"

It was mine too, and I highly respected Miss Mowcher for it.

We had now seen all there was to see. It would have been in vain to represent to such a man as the Worshipful Mr. Creakle that Twenty-Seven and Twenty-Eight were perfectly consistent and unchanged; that exactly what they were then, they had always been; that the hypocritical knaves were just the subjects to make that sort of profession in such a place; that they knew its market value at least as well as we did, in the immediate service it would do them when they were expatriated; in a word, that it was a rotten, hollow, painfully-suggestive piece of business altogether. We left them to their system and themselves, and went home wondering.

"Perhaps it's a good thing, Traddles," said I, "to have an unsound Hobby ridden hard; for it's the sooner ridden to death."

"I hope so," replied Traddles.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A LIGHT SHINES ON MY WAY.

THE year came round to Christmas-time, and I had been at home above two months. I had seen Agnes frequently. However loud the general voice might be in giving me encouragement, and however fervent the emotions and endeavors to which it roused me, I heard her lightest word of praise as I heard nothing else.

At least once a week, and sometimes oftener, I rode over there, and passed the evening. I usually rode back at night; for the old unhappy sense was always hovering about me now — most sorrowfully when I left her — and I was glad to be up and out, rather than wandering over the past in weary wakefulness or miserable dreams. I wore away the longest part of many wild sad nights in those rides; reviving, as I went, the thoughts that had occupied me in my long absence.

Or, if I were to say rather that I listened to the echoes of those thoughts, I should better express the truth. They spoke to me from afar off. I had put them at a distance, and accepted my inevitable place. When I read to Agnes what I wrote; when I saw her listening face; moved her to smiles or

tears ; and heard her cordial voice so earnest on the shadowy events of that imaginative world in which I lived ; I thought what a fate mine might have been — but only thought so, as I had thought, after I was married to Dora, what I could have wished my wife to be.

My duty to Agnes, who loved me with a love which, if I disquieted, I wronged most selfishly and poorly, and could never restore ; my matured assurance that I, who had worked out my own destiny, and won what I had impetuously set my heart on, had no right to murmur, and must bear ; comprised what I felt and what I had learned. But I loved her : and now it even became some consolation to me, vaguely to conceive a distant day when I might blamelessly avow it, when all this should be over ; when I could say, "Agnes, so it was when I came home ; and now I am old, and I never have loved since !"

She did not once show me any change in herself. What she always had been to me, she still was ; wholly unaltered.

Between my aunt and me there had been something, in this connection, since the night of my return, which I cannot call a restraint, or an avoidance of the subject, so much as an implied understanding that we thought of it together, but did not shape our thoughts into words. When, according to our old custom, we sat before the fire at night, we often fell into this train ; as naturally, and as consciously to each other, as if we had unreservedly said so. But we preserved an unbroken silence. I believed that she had read, or partly read, my thoughts that night ; and that she fully compre-

hended why I gave mine no more distinct expression.

This Christmas-time being come, and Agnes having reposed no new confidence in me, a doubt that had several times arisen in my mind — whether she could have that perception of the true state of my breast, which restrained her with the apprehension of giving me pain — began to oppress me heavily. If that were so, my sacrifice was nothing; my plainest obligation to her unfulfilled; and every poor action I had shrunk from, I was hourly doing. I resolved to set this right beyond all doubt; — if such a barrier were between us, to break it down at once with a determined hand.

It was — what lasting reason have I to remember it! — a cold, harsh, winter day. There had been snow some hours before; and it lay, not deep, but hard frozen on the ground. Out at sea, beyond my window, the wind blew ruggedly from the north. I had been thinking of it, sweeping over those mountain-wastes of snow in Switzerland, then inaccessible to any human foot; and had been speculating which was the lonelier, these solitary regions, or a deserted ocean.

“Riding to-day, Trot?” said my aunt, putting her head in at the door.

“Yes,” said I. “I am going over to Canterbury. It’s a good day for a ride.”

“I hope your horse may think so too,” said my aunt; “but at present he is holding down his head and his ears, standing before the door there, as if he thought his stable preferable.”

My aunt, I may observe, allowed my horse on the forbidden ground, but had not at all relented toward the donkeys.

"He will be fresh enough presently!" said I.

"The ride will do his master good, at all events," observed my aunt, glancing at the papers on my table. "Ah, child, you pass a good many hours here! I never thought, when I used to read books, what work it was to write them."

"It's work enough to read them sometimes," I returned. "As to the writing, it has its own charms, aunt."

"Ah! I see!" said my aunt. "Ambition, love of approbation, sympathy, and much more, I suppose? Well: go along with you!"

"Do you know anything more," said I, standing composedly before her — she had patted me on the shoulder, and sat down in my chair — "of that attachment of Agnes?"

She looked up in my face a little while before replying, —

"I think I do, Trot."

"Are you confirmed in your impression?" I inquired.

"I think I am, Trot."

She looked so steadfastly at me: with a kind of doubt, or pity, or suspense in her affection: that I summoned the stronger determination to show her a perfectly cheerful face.

"And what is more, Trot —" said my aunt.

"Yes!"

"I think Agnes is going to be married."

"God bless her!" said I cheerfully.

"God bless her!" said my aunt, "and her husband too!"

I echoed it, parted from my aunt, went lightly downstairs, mounted, and rode away. There was

greater reason than before to do what I had resolved to do.

How well I recollect the wintry ride ! The frozen particles of ice, brushed from the blades of grass by the wind, and borne across my face ; the hard clatter of the horse's hoofs, beating a tune upon the ground ; the stiff-tilled soil : the snowdrift, lightly eddying in the chalk-pit as the breeze ruffled it ; the smoking team with the wagon of old hay, stopping to breathe on the hilltop, and shaking their bells musically ; the whitened slopes and sweeps of downland lying against the dark sky, as if they were drawn on a huge slate !

I found Agnes alone. The little girls had gone to their own homes now, and she was alone by the fire, reading. She put down her book on seeing me come in ; and having welcomed me as usual, took her work-basket and sat in one of the old-fashioned windows.

I sat beside her on the window-seat, and we talked of what I was doing, and when it would be done, and of the progress I had made since my last visit. Agnes was very cheerful ; and laughingly predicted that I should soon become too famous to be talked to on such subjects.

"So I make the most of the present time, you see," said Agnes, "and talk to you while I may."

As I looked at her beautiful face, observant of her work, she raised her mild clear eyes, and saw that I was looking at her.

"You are thoughtful to-day, Trotwood !"

"Agnes, shall I tell you what about ? I came to tell you."

She put aside her work, as she was used to do

when we were seriously discussing anything; and gave me her whole attention.

"My dear Agnes, do you doubt my being true to you?"

"No!" she answered with a look of astonishment.

"Do you doubt my being what I always have been to you?"

"No!" she answered as before.

"Do you remember that I tried to tell you, when I came home, what a debt of gratitude I owed you, dearest Agnes, and how fervently I felt towards you?"

"I remember it," she said gently, "very well."

"You have a secret," said I. "Let me share it, Agnes."

She cast down her eyes, and trembled.

"I could hardly fail to know, even if I had not heard—but from other lips than yours, Agnes, which seems strange—that there is some one upon whom you have bestowed the treasure of your love. Do not shut me out of what concerns your happiness so nearly! If you can trust me as you say you can, and as I know you may, let me be your friend, your brother, in this matter of all others!"

With an appealing, almost a reproachful glance, she rose from the window; and hurrying across the room as if without knowing where, put her hands before her face, and burst into such tears as smote me to the heart.

And yet they awakened something in me, bringing promise to my heart. Without my knowing why, these tears allied themselves with the quietly sad smile which was so fixed in my remembrance, and shook me more with hope than fear or sorrow.

"Agnes! Sister! Dearest! What have I done?"

"Let me go away, Trotwood. I am not well. I am not myself. I will speak to you by and by — another time. I will write to you. Don't speak to me now. Don't! don't!"

I sought to recollect what she had said, when I had spoken to her on that former night, of her affection needing no return. It seemed a very world that I must search through in a moment.

"Agnes, I cannot bear to see you so, and think that I have been the cause. My dearest girl, dearer to me than anything in life, if you are unhappy, let me share your unhappiness. If you are in need of help or counsel, let me try to give it to you. If you have indeed a burden on your heart, let me try to lighten it. For whom do I live now, Agnes, if it is not for you?"

"Oh, spare me! I am not myself! Another time!" was all I could distinguish.

Was it a selfish error that was leading me away? Or, having once a clew to hope, was there something opening to me that I had not dared to think of?

"I must say more. I cannot let you leave me so! For Heaven's sake, Agnes, let us not mistake each other after all these years, and all that has come and gone with them! I must speak plainly. If you have any lingering thought that I could envy the happiness you will confer; that I could not resign you to a dearer protector, of your own choosing; that I could not, from my removed place, be a contented witness of your joy; dismiss it, for I don't deserve it! I have not suffered quite in vain. You have not taught me quite in vain. There is no alloy of self in what I feel for you."

She was quiet now. In a little time she turned her pale face towards me, and said in a low voice, broken here and there, but very clear, —

“I owe it to your pure friendship for me, Trotwood — which, indeed, I do not doubt — to tell you you are mistaken. I can do no more. If I have sometimes, in the course of years, wanted help and counsel, they have come to me. If I have sometimes been unhappy, the feeling has passed away. If I have ever had a burden on my heart, it has been lightened for me. If I have any secret, it is — no new one; and is — not what you suppose. I cannot reveal it, or divide it. It has long been mine, and must remain mine.”

“Agnes! Stay! A moment!”

She was going away, but I detained her. I clasped my arm about her waist. “In the course of years!” “It is not a new one!” New thoughts and hopes were whirling through my mind, and all the colors of my life were changing.

“Dearest Agnes! Whom I so respect and honor — whom I so devotedly love! When I came here to-day, I thought that nothing could have wrested this confession from me. I thought I could have kept it in my bosom all our lives, till we were old. But, Agnes, if I have indeed any new-born hope that I may ever call you something more than Sister, widely different from Sister! —”

Her tears fell fast; but they were not like those she had lately shed, and I saw my hope brighten in them.

“Agnes! Ever my guide, and best support! If you had been more mindful of yourself, and less of me, when we grew up here together, I think my

heedless fancy never would have wandered from you. But you were so much better than I, so necessary to me in every boyish hope and disappointment, that to have you to confide in, and rely upon in everything, became a second nature, supplanting for the time the first and greater one of loving you as I do !”

Still weeping, but not sadly — joyfully ! And clasped in my arms as she had never been, as I had thought she never was to be !

“When I loved Dora — fondly, Agnes, as you know —”

“Yes !” she cried earnestly. “I am glad to know it !”

“When I loved her — even then, my love would have been incomplete without your sympathy. I had it, and it was perfected. And when I lost her, Agnes, what should I have been without you still ?”

Closer in my arms, nearer to my heart, her trembling hand upon my shoulder, her sweet eyes shining through her tears on mine !

“I went away, dear Agnes, loving you. I staid away, loving you. I returned home, loving you !”

And now, I tried to tell her of the struggle I had had, and the conclusion I had come to. I tried to lay my mind before her, truly and entirely. I tried to show her how I had hoped I had come into the better knowledge of myself and of her ; how I had resigned myself to what that better knowledge brought ; and how I had come there, even that day, in my fidelity to this. If she did so love me (I said) that she could take me for her husband, she could do so on no deserving of mine, except upon the truth of my love for her, and the trouble in which it had ripened to be what it was ; and hence

it was that I revealed it. And oh, Agnes, even out of thy true eyes, in that same time, the spirit of my child-wife looked upon me, saying it was well; and winning me, through thee, to tenderest recollections of the blossom that had withered in its bloom!

"I am so blessed, Trotwood — my heart is so overcharged — but there is one thing I must say."

"Dearest, what?"

She laid her gentle hands upon my shoulders, and looked calmly in my face.

"Do you know, yet, what it is?"

"I am afraid to speculate on what it is. Tell me, my dear."

"I have loved you all my life!"

Oh, we were happy, we were happy! Our tears were not for the trials (hers so much the greater) through which we had come to be thus, but for the rapture of being thus, never to be divided more!

We walked, that winter evening, in the fields together; and the blessed calm within us seemed to be partaken by the frosty air. The early stars began to shine while we were lingering on, and, looking up to them, we thanked our God for having guided us to this tranquillity.

We stood together in the same old-fashioned window at night, when the moon was shining; Agnes with her quiet eyes raised up to it; I following her glance. Long miles of road then opened out before my mind; and, toiling on, I saw a ragged, wayworn boy forsaken and neglected, who should come to call even the heart now beating against mine his own.

It was nearly dinner-time next day when we

appeared before my aunt. She was up in my study, Peggotty said: which it was her pride to keep in readiness and order for me. We found her, in her spectacles, sitting by the fire.

"Goodness me!" said my aunt, peering through the dusk, "who's this you're bringing home?"

"Agnes," said I.

As we had arranged to say nothing at first, my aunt was not a little discomfited. She darted a hopeful glance at me when I said "Agnes;" but, seeing that I looked as usual, she took off her spectacles in despair, and rubbed her nose with them.

She greeted Agnes heartily, nevertheless; and we were soon in the lighted parlor downstairs, at dinner. My aunt put on her spectacles twice or thrice, to take another look at me, but as often took them off again, disappointed, and rubbed her nose with them. Much to the discomfiture of Mr. Dick, who knew this to be a bad symptom.

"By the by, aunt," said I after dinner, "I have been speaking to Agnes about what you told me."

"Then, Trot," said my aunt, turning scarlet, "you did wrong, and broke your promise."

"You are not angry, aunt, I trust? I am sure you won't be, when you learn that Agnes is not unhappy in any attachment."

"Stuff and nonsense!" said my aunt.

As my aunt appeared to be annoyed, I thought the best way was to cut her annoyance short. I took Agnes in my arm to the back of her chair, and we both leaned over her. My aunt, with one clap of her hands, and one look through her spectacles, immediately went into hysterics, for the first and only time in all my knowledge of her.

The hysterics called up Peggotty. The moment my aunt was restored, she flew at Peggotty, and calling her a silly old creature, hugged her with all her might. After that she hugged Mr. Dick (who was highly honored, but a good deal surprised); and, after that, told them why. Then we were all happy together.

I could not discover whether my aunt, in her last short conversation with me, had fallen on a pious fraud, or had really mistaken the state of my mind. It was quite enough, she said, that she had told me Agnes was going to be married; and that I now knew better than any one how true it was.

We were married within a fortnight. Traddles and Sophy, and Doctor and Mrs. Strong, were the only guests at our quiet wedding. We left them full of joy; and drove away together. Clapsed in my embrace, I held the source of every worthy aspiration I had ever had; the centre of myself, the circle of my life, my own, my wife; my love of whom was founded on a rock!

"Dearest husband!" said Agnes. "Now that I may call you by that name, I have one thing more to tell you."

"Let me hear it, love."

"It grows out of the night when Dora died. She sent you for me."

"She did."

"She told me that she left me something. Can you think what it was?"

I believed I could. I drew the wife who had so loved me closer to my side.

"She told me that she made a last request to me, and left me a last charge."

“And it was —”

“That only I would occupy this vacant place.”

And Agnes laid her head upon my breast, and wept; and I wept with her, though we were so happy.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A VISITOR.

WHAT I have purposed to record is nearly finished; but there is yet an incident conspicuous in my memory, on which it often rests with delight, and without which one thread in the web I have spun would have a ravelled end.

I had advanced in fame and fortune, my domestic joy was perfect, I had been married ten happy years. Agnes and I were sitting by the fire, in our house in London, one night in spring, and three of our children were playing in the room, when I was told that a stranger wished to see me.

He had been asked if he came on business, and had answered No; he had come for the pleasure of seeing me, and had come a long way. He was an old man, my servant said, and looked like a farmer.

As this sounded mysterious to the children, and moreover was like the beginning of a favorite story Agnes used to tell them, introductory to the arrival of a wicked old Fairy in a cloak who hated everybody, it produced some commotion. One of our boys laid his head in his mother's lap to be out of harm's way, and little Agnes (our eldest child) left her doll in a chair to represent her, and thrust out

her little heap of golden curls from between the window curtains, to see what happened next.

"Let him come in here!" said I.

There soon appeared, pausing in the dark doorway as he entered, a hale, gray-haired old man. Little Agnes, attracted by his looks, had run to bring him in, and I had not yet clearly seen his face, when my wife, starting up, cried out to me, in a pleased and agitated voice, that it was Mr. Peggotty!

It *was* Mr. Peggotty. An old man now, but in a ruddy, hearty, strong old age. When our first emotion was over, and he sat before the fire with the children on his knees, and the blaze shining on his face, he looked to me as vigorous and robust, withal as handsome, an old man as ever I had seen.

"Mas'r Davy—" said he. And the old name in the old tone fell so naturally on my ear! "Mas'r Davy, 'tis a joyful hour as I see you, once more, 'long with your own trew wife!"

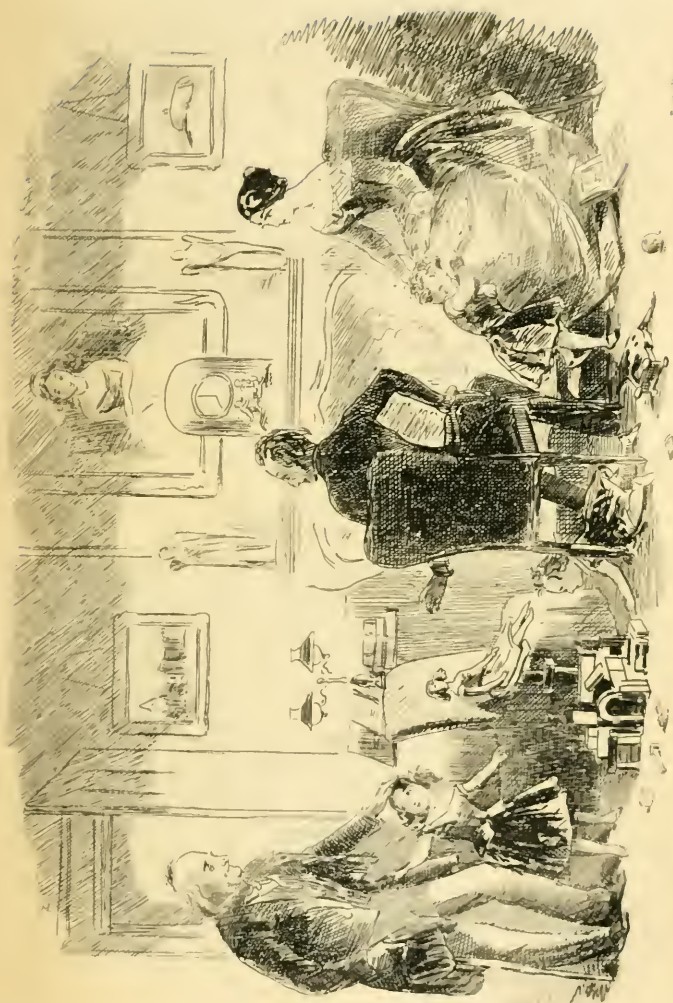
"A joyful hour indeed, old friend!" cried I.

"And these heer pretty ones," said Mr. Peggotty. "To look at these heer flowers! Why, Mas'r Davy, you was but the heighth of the littlest of these when I first see you! When Em'ly warn't no bigger, and our poor lad were *but* a lad!"

"Time has changed me more than it has changed you since then," said I. "But let these dear rogues go to bed; and, as no house in England but this must hold you, tell me where to send for your luggage (is the old black bag among it, that went so far, I wonder?), and then, over a glass of Yarmouth grog, we will have the tidings of ten years!"

"Are you alone?" asked Agnes.

"Yes, ma'am," he said, kissing her hand, "quite alone."



We sat him between us, not knowing how to give him welcome enough; and, as I began to listen to his old familiar voice, I could have fancied he was still pursuing his long journey in search of his darling niece.

"It's a mort of water," said Mr. Peggotty, "fur to come across, and on'y stay a matter of fower weeks. But water ('specially when 'tis salt) comes nat'ral to me; and friends is dear, and I am heer. — Which is verse," said Mr. Peggotty, surprised to find it out, "though I hadn't such intentions."

"Are you going back those many thousand miles so soon?" asked Agnes.

"Yes, ma'am," he returned. "I giv' the promise to Em'ly afore I come away. You see, I doen't grow younger as the years comes round, and if I hadn't sailed as 'twas, most like I shouldn't never have done 't. And it's allus been on my mind as I *must* come and see Mas'r Davy and your own sweet blooming self, in your wedded happiness, afore I got to be too old."

He looked at us as if he could never feast his eyes on us sufficiently. Agnes laughingly put back some scattered locks of his gray hair, that he might see us better.

"And now tell us," said I, "everything relating to your fortunes."

"Our fortunes, Mas'r Davy," he rejoined, "is soon told. We haven't fared nohows, but fared to thrive. We've allus thrived. We've worked as we ought to 't, and maybe we lived a leetle hard at first or so, but we have allus thrived. What with sheep-farming, and what with stock-farming, and what with one thing and what with t'other, we are as well

to do as well could be. Theer's been keinder a blessing fell upon us," said Mr. Peggotty, reverentially inclining his head, "and we've done nowt but prosper. That is, in the long-run. If not yesterday, why then to-day. If not to-day, why then to-morrow."

"And Emily?" said Agnes and I both together.

"Em'ly," said he, "arter you left her, ma'am — and I never heerd her saying of her prayers at night, t'other side the canvas screen, when we was settled in the Bush, but what I heerd your name — and arter she and me lost sight of Mas'r Davy, that theer shining sundown — was that low, at first, that, if she had knowed then what Mas'r Davy kep' from us so kind and thowtful, 'tis my opinion she'd have drooped away. But theer was some poor folks aboard as had illness among 'em, and she took care of *them*; and theer was the children in our company, and she took care of *them*; and so she got to be busy, and to be doing good, and that helped her."

"When did she first hear of it?" I asked.

"I kep' it from her arter I heerd on 't," said Mr. Peggotty, "going on nigh a year. We was living then in a solitary place, but among the beautifullest trees, and with the roses a covering our Beein to the roof. Theer come along one day, when I was out a working on the land, a traveller from our own Norfolk or Suffolk in England (I doen't rightly mind which), and of course we took him in, and giv' him to eat and drink, and made him welcome. We all do that, all the colony over. He'd got an old newspaper with him, and some other accounts in print of the storm. That's how she knowed it. When I come home at night, I found she knowed it."

He dropped his voice as he said these words, and the gravity I so well remembered overspread his face.

"Did it change her much?" we asked.

"Ay, for a good long time," he said, shaking his head; "if not to this present hour. But I think the solitooode done her good. And she had a deal to mind in the way of poultry and the like, and minded of it, and come through. I wonder," he said thoughtfully, "if you could see my Em'ly now, Mas'r Davy, whether you'd know her!"

"Is she so altered?" I inquired.

"I doesn't know. I see her ev'ry day, and doesn't know; but, odd times, I have thowt so. A slight figure," said Mr. Peggotty, looking at the fire, "keinder worn; soft, sorrowful, blue eyes; a delicate face: a pritty head, leaning a little down; a quiet voice and way — timid a'most. That's Em'ly!"

We silently observed him as he sat, still looking at the fire.

"Some thinks," he said, "as her affection was ill bestowed; some as her marriage was broke off by death. No one knows how 'tis. She might have married well a mort of times, 'but, uncle,' she says to me, 'that's gone forever.' Cheerful along with me; retired when others is by; fond of going any distance fur to teach a child, or fur to tend a sick person, or fur to do some kindness tow'ards a young girl's wedding (and she's done a many, but has never seen one); fondly loving of her uncle; patient; liked by young and old; sowt out by all that has any trouble. That's Em'ly!"

He drew his hand across his face, and with a half-suppressed sigh looked up from the fire.

"Is Martha with you yet?" I asked.

"Martha," he replied, "got married, Mas'r Davy, in the second year. A young man, a farm laborer, as come by us on his way to market with his mas'r's drays—a journey of over five hundred mile, theer and back—made offers fur to take her fur his wife (wives is very scarce theer), and then to set up fur their two selves in the Bush. She spoke to me fur to tell him her trew story. I did. They was married, and they live fower hundred mile away from any voices but their own and the singing birds."

"Mrs. Gummidge?" I suggested.

It was a pleasant key to touch, for Mr. Peggotty suddenly burst into a roar of laughter, and rubbed his hands up and down his legs, as he had been accustomed to do when he enjoyed himself in the long-shipwrecked boat.

"Would you believe it?" he said. "Why, some-un even made offers fur to marry *her*! If a ship's cook that was turning settler, Mas'r Davy, didn't make offers fur to marry Missis Gummidge, I'm Gormed—and I can't say no fairer than that!"

I never saw Agnes laugh so. This sudden ecstasy on the part of Mr. Peggotty was so delightful to her, that she could not leave off laughing; and the more she laughed, the more she made me laugh, and the greater Mr. Peggotty's ecstasy became, and the more he rubbed his legs.

"And what did Mrs. Gummidge say?" I asked when I was grave enough.

"If you'll believe me," returned Mr. Peggotty, "Missis Gummidge, 'stead of saying, 'Thank you, I'm much obleeged to you, I ain't a-going fur to

change my condition at my time of life,' up'd with a bucket as was standing by, and laid it over that theer ship's cook's head till he sung out fur help, and I went in and reskied of him."

Mr. Peggotty burst into a great roar of laughter, and Agnes and I both kept him company.

"But I must say this for the good creetur," he resumed, wiping his face, when we were quite exhausted; "she has been all she said she'd be to us, and more. She's the willingest, the trewest, the honestest-helping woman, Mas'r Davy, as ever drewed the breath of life. I have never knowed her to be lone and lorn for a single minute, not even when the colony was all afore us, and we was new to it. And thinking of the old 'un is a thing she never done, I do assure you, since she left England!"

"Now, last, not least, Mr. Micawber," said I. "He has paid off every obligation he incurred here—even to Traddles's bill, you remember, my dear Agnes—and therefore we may take it for granted that he is doing well. But what is the latest news of him?"

Mr. Peggotty, with a smile, put his hand in his breast-pocket, and produced a flat-folded paper parcel, from which he took out, with much care, a little odd-looking newspaper.

"You are to unnerstan', Mas'r Davy," said he, "as we have left the Bush now, being so well to do; and have gone right away round to Port Middlebay Harbor, wheer theer's what *we* call a town."

"Mr. Micawber was in the Bush near you?" said I.

"Bless you, yes," said Mr. Peggotty, "and turned to with a will. I never wish to meet a better gen-

'T'man for turning to with a will. I've seen that theer bald head of his a perspiring in the sun, Mas'r Davy, till I a'most thowt it would have melted away. And now he's a magistrate."

"A Magistrate, eh?" said I.

Mr. Peggotty pointed to a certain paragraph in the newspaper, where I read aloud as follows, from the "Port Middlebay Times:"—

" The public dinner to our distinguished fellow colonist and townsman, WILKINS MICAWEB, ESQUIRE, Port Middlebay District Magistrate, came off yesterday in the large room of the Hotel, which was crowded to suffocation. It is estimated that not fewer than forty-seven persons must have been accommodated with dinner at one time, exclusive of the company in the passage and on the stairs. The beauty, fashion, and exclusiveness of Port Middlebay flocked to do honor to one so deservedly esteemed, so highly talented, and so widely popular. Doctor Mell (of Colonial Salem-House Grammar School, Port Middlebay) presided, and on his right sat the distinguished guest. After the removal of the cloth, and the singing of Non Nobis (beautifully executed, and in which we were at no loss to distinguish the bell-like notes of that gifted amateur, WILKINS MICAWEB, ESQUIRE, JUNIOR), the usual loyal and patriotic toasts were severally given and rapturously received. Doctor Mell, in a speech replete with feeling, then proposed 'Our distinguished Guest, the ornament of our town. May he never leave us but to better himself, and may his success among us be such as to render his bettering himself impossible!' The cheering with which the

toast was received defies description. Again and again it rose and fell, like the waves of ocean. At length all was hushed, and WILKINS MICAWBER, Esquire, presented himself to return thanks. Far be it from us, in the present comparatively imperfect state of the resources of our establishment, to endeavor to follow our distinguished townsman through the smoothly flowing periods of his polished and highly ornate address! Suffice it to observe, that it was a masterpiece of eloquence; and that those passages in which he more particularly traced his own successful career to its source, and warned the younger portion of his auditory from the shoals of ever incurring pecuniary liabilities which they were unable to liquidate, brought a tear into the manliest eye present. The remaining toasts were DOCTOR MELL; MRS. MICAWBER (who gracefully bowed her acknowledgments from the side-door, where a galaxy of beauty was elevated on chairs, at once to witness and adorn the gratifying scene); MRS. RIDGER BEGS (late Miss Micawber); MRS. MELL; WILKINS MICAWBER, ESQUIRE, JUNIOR (who convulsed the assembly by humorously remarking that he found himself unable to return thanks in a speech but would do so, with their permission, in a song); MRS. MICAWBER'S FAMILY (well known, it is needless to remark, in the mother country), &c., &c., &c. At the conclusion of the proceedings the tables were cleared as if by art-magic for dancing. Among the votaries of TERPSICHORE, who disported themselves until Sol gave warning for departure, Wilkins Micawber, Esquire, Junior, and the lovely and accomplished Miss Helena, fourth daughter of Doctor Mell, were particularly remarkable."

I was looking back to the name of Doctor Mell, pleased to have discovered, in these happier circumstances, Mr. Mell, formerly a poor pinched usher to my Middlesex magistrate, when, Mr. Peggotty pointing to another part of the paper, my eyes rested on my own name, and I read thus : —

“TO DAVID COPPERFIELD, ESQUIRE,

“THE EMINENT AUTHOR.

“MY DEAR SIR,

“Years have elapsed since I had an opportunity of ocularly perusing the lineaments, now familiar to the imaginations of a considerable portion of the civilized world.

“But, my dear sir, though estranged (by the force of circumstances over which I have had no control) from the personal society of the friend and companion of my youth, I have not been unmindful of his soaring flight. Nor have I been debarred,

‘Though seas between us braid ha’ roared,’

(BURNS) from participating in the intellectual feasts he has spread before us.

“I cannot, therefore, allow of the departure from this place of an individual whom we mutually respect and esteem, without, my dear sir, taking this public opportunity of thanking you, on my own behalf, and, I may undertake to add, on that of the whole of the inhabitants of Port Middlebay, for the gratification of which you are the ministering agent.

“Go on, my dear sir! You are not unknown here, you are not unappreciated. Though ‘remote,’

we are neither 'unfriended,' 'melancholy,' nor (I may add) 'slow.' Go on, my dear sir, in your Eagle course! The inhabitants of Port Middlebay may at least aspire to watch it with delight, with entertainment, with instruction!

"Among the eyes elevated towards you from this portion of the globe will ever be found, while it has light and life,

"The

"Eye

"Appertaining to

"WILKINS MICAWBER,

"Magistrate."

I found, on glancing at the remaining contents of the newspaper, that Mr. Micawber was a diligent and esteemed correspondent of that Journal. There was another letter from him in the same paper, touching a bridge; there was an advertisement of a collection of similar letters by him, to be shortly republished, in a neat volume, "with considerable additions;" and, unless I am very much mistaken, the Leading Article was his also.

We talked much of Mr. Micawber on many other evenings while Mr. Peggotty remained with us. He lived with us during the whole term of his stay, — which, I think, was something less than a month, — and his sister and my aunt came to London to see him. Agnes and I parted from him aboard ship when he sailed; and we shall never part from him more on earth.

But, before he left, he went with me to Yarmouth, to see a little tablet I had put up in the churchyard to the memory of Ham. While I was copying the

plain inscription for him at his request, I saw him stoop, and gather a tuft of grass from the grave, and a little earth.

“For Em’ly,” he said as he put it in his breast.
“I promised, Mas’r Davy.”

CHAPTER XXV.

A LAST RETROSPECT.

AND now my written story ends. I look back once more — for the last time — before I close these leaves.

I see myself, with Agnes at my side, journeying along the road of life. I see our children and our friends around us; and I hear the roar of many voices, not indifferent to me as I travel on.

What faces are the most distinct to me in the fleeting crowd? Lo, these; all turning to me as I ask my thoughts the question!

Here is my aunt, in stronger spectacles, an old woman of fourscore years and more, but upright yet, and a steady walker of six miles at a stretch in winter weather.

Always with her, here comes Peggotty, my good old nurse, likewise in spectacles, accustomed to do needlework at night very close to the lamp, but never sitting down to it without a bit of wax candle, a yard-measure in a little house, and a workbox with a picture of St. Paul's upon the lid.

The cheeks and arms of Peggotty, so hard and red in my childish days, when I wondered why the birds didn't peck her in preference to apples, are

shrivelled now; and her eyes, that used to darken their whole neighborhood in her face, are fainter (though they glitter still); but her rough forefinger, which I once associated with a pocket nutmeg-grater, is just the same, and when I see my least child catching at it as it totters from my aunt to her, I think of our little parlor at home, when I could scarcely walk. My aunt's old disappointment is set right now. She is godmother to a real living Betsey Trotwood; and Dora (the next in order) says she spoils her.

There is something bulky in Peggotty's pocket. It is nothing smaller than the Crocodile Book, which is in rather a dilapidated condition by this time, with divers of the leaves torn and stitched across, but which Peggotty exhibits to the children as a precious relic. I find it very curious to see my own infant face looking up at me from the crocodile stories; and to be reminded by it of my old acquaintance, Brooks of Sheffield.

Among my boys, this summer holiday-time, I see an old man making giant kites, and gazing at them in the air, with a delight for which there are no words. He greets me rapturously, and whispers, with many nods and winks, "Trotwood, you will be glad to hear that I shall finish the Memorial when I have nothing else to do, and that your aunt's the most extraordinary woman in the world, sir!"

Who is this bent lady, supporting herself by a stick, and showing me a countenance in which there are some traces of old pride and beauty, feebly contending with a querulous, imbecile, fretful wandering of the mind? She is in a garden; and near her stands a sharp, dark, withered woman, with a

white scar on her lip. Let me hear what they say.

"Rosa, I have forgotten this gentleman's name."

Rosa bends over her, and calls to her, "Mr. Copperfield."

"I am glad to see you, sir. I am sorry to observe you are in mourning. I hope time will be good to you."

Her impatient attendant scolds her, tells her I am not in mourning, bids her look again, tries to rouse her.

"You have seen my son, sir?" says the elder lady. "Are you reconciled?"

Looking fixedly at me, she puts her hand to her forehead, and moans. Suddenly, she cries, in a terrible voice, "Rosa, come to me. He is dead!" Rosa, kneeling at her feet, by turns caresses her, and quarrels with her; now fiercely telling her, "I loved him better than you ever did!" — now soothing her to sleep on her breast, like a sick child. Thus I leave them; thus I always find them; thus they wear their time away from year to year.

What ship comes sailing home from India, and what English lady is this, married to a growling old Scotch Cræsus with great flaps of ears? Can this be Julia Mills?

Indeed it is Julia Mills, peevish and fine, with a black man to carry cards and letters to her on a golden salver, and a copper-colored woman in linen, with a bright handkerchief round her head, to serve her Tiffin in her dressing-room. But Julia keeps no diary in these days; never sings Affection's Dirge; eternally quarrels with the old Scotch Cræsus, who is a sort of yellow bear with a tanned hide. Julia

is steeped in money to the throat, and talks and thinks of nothing else. I liked her better in the Desert of Sahara.

Or perhaps this *is* the Desert of Sahara? For, though Julia has a stately house, and mighty company, and sumptuous dinners every day, I see no green growth near her; nothing that can ever come to fruit or flower. What Julia calls "society," I see; among it Mr. Jack Maldon, from his Patent Place, sneering at the hand that gave it him, and speaking to me of the Doctor as "so charmingly antique." But when society is the name for such hollow gentlemen and ladies, Julia, and when its breeding is professed indifference to everything that can advance or can retard mankind, I think we must have lost ourselves in that same Desert of Sahara, and had better find the way out.

And lo, the Doctor, always our good friend, laboring at his Dictionary (somewhere about the letter D), and happy in his home and wife. Also the Old Soldier, on a considerably reduced footing, and by no means so influential as in days of yore!

Working at his chambers in the Temple, with a busy aspect, and his hair (where he is not bald) made more rebellious than ever by the constant friction of his lawyer's wig, I come, in a later time, upon my dear old Traddles. His table is covered with thick piles of papers; and I say, as I look around me, —

"If Sophy were your clerk now, Traddles, she would have enough to do!"

"You may say that, my dear Copperfield! But those were capital days, too, in Holborn Court! Were they not?"

"When she told you you would be a Judge? But it was not the town talk *then*!"

"At all events," says Traddles, "if I ever am one —"

"Why, you know you will be."

"Well, my dear Copperfield, *when* I am one, I shall tell the story, as I said I would."

We walk away, arm-in-arm. I am going to have a family dinner with Traddles. It is Sophy's birthday; and, on our road, Traddles discourses to me of the good fortune he has enjoyed.

"I really have been able, my dear Copperfield, to do all that I had most at heart. There's the Reverend Horace promoted to that living at four hundred and fifty pounds a year; there are our two boys receiving the very best education, and distinguishing themselves as steady scholars and good fellows; there are three of the girls married very comfortably; there are three more living with us; there are three more keeping house for the Reverend Horace since Mrs. Crewler's decease; and all of them happy."

"Except —" I suggest.

"Except the Beauty," says Traddles. "Yes. It was very unfortunate that she should marry such a vagabond. But there was a certain dash and glare about him that caught her. However, now we have got her safe at our house, and got rid of him, we must cheer her up again."

Traddles's house is one of the very houses — or it easily may have been — which he and Sophy used to parcel out in their evening walks. It is a large house; but Traddles keeps his papers in his dressing-room, and his boots with his papers; and he and

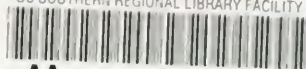
Sophy squeeze themselves into upper rooms, reserving the best bedrooms for the Beauty and the girls. There is no room to spare in the house; for more of "the girls" are here, and always are here, by some accident or other, than I know how to count. Here, when we go in, is a crowd of them, running down to the door, and handing Traddles about to be kissed, until he is out of breath. Here, established in perpetuity, is the poor Beauty, a widow with a little girl; here, at dinner on Sophy's birthday, are the three married girls with their three husbands, and one of the husband's brothers, and another husband's cousin, and another husband's sister, who appears to me to be engaged to the cousin. Traddles, exactly the same simple, unaffected fellow as he ever was, sits at the foot of the large table like a Patriarch; and Sophy beams upon him, from the head, across a cheerful space that is certainly not glittering with Britannia metal.

And now, as I close my task, subduing my desire to linger yet, these faces fade away. But, one face, shining on me like a Heavenly light by which I see all other objects, is above them and beyond them all. And that remains.

I turn my head, and see it, in its beautiful serenity, beside me. My lamp burns low, and I have written far into the night; but the dear presence, without which I were nothing, bears me company.

Oh, Agnes! oh, my soul! so may thy face be by me when I close my life indeed; so may I, when realities are melting from me like the shadows which I now dismiss, still find thee near me pointing upward!

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